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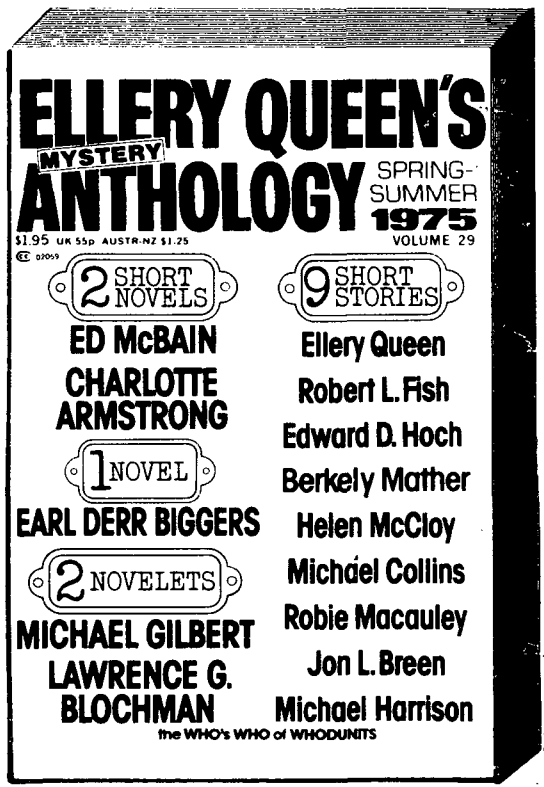

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The World's Leading Mystery Magazine

ELLERY QUEEN'S
Mystery Magazine

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THE MERRY BAND

by MICHAEL GILBERT

The late-afternoon sun, shining through the barred skylight, striped the bodies of the four boys sprawled on the floor. Nearby the Sunday traffic went panting down the Wandsworth High Street, but in this quiet, upper back room the loudest noise was the buzzing of a bluebottle. The warm, imprisoned air smelled of copperas and leather and gun oil.

The oldest and tallest of the boys was sitting up, with his back propped against the wall. In one hand he held a piece of cloth, something that might once have been a handkerchief, and he was using it to polish and repolish a powerful-looking air pistol.

"They're beauties, ent they, Rob?" said the fat boy. He and the red-haired boy both had guns like their leader's. The smallest boy had nothing. He couldn't take his eyes off the shining beauties.

"Made in Belgium," said Rob. "See that gadget?" He put the tip of his finger on the telltale

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at the end of the compression chamber. "You don't just open it and shut it, like a cheap air gun. You pump this one up slowly. That gadget shows you when the pressure's right. It's accurate up to fifty yards."

"*It* may be accurate," said the fat boy. "What about us? I've never had a gun before."

"We'll have to practise. Practise till we can hit a penny across the room."

"Why don't we start right now, Rob?" said the red-haired boy. "These things don't make any noise. Not to notice. We could chalk up a target on the wall—"

"Yes?" said Rob. "And when the geezer who owns this shop comes up here tomorrow morning, or next week, or whenever he does happen to come up here, and he finds his wall full of air-gun pellets, he's going to start thinking, isn't he? He's going to check over his spare stock and find three guns missing. Right?"

"That's right," said the fat boy. "Rob's got it figured out. We put everything else back like we found it, it may be months before he knows what's been took. He mayn't even know anyone's broke in."

The leader turned to the smallest of his followers. "That's why you can't have one, Winkle," he said. "There's plenty of guns in the front of the shop, but we touch one of them, he'll miss it."

"That's all right, Rob," said Winkle. But he couldn't keep the longing out of his voice. To own a big bright gun! A gun that went *phtt* softly, like an angry snake, and your enemy fifty yards away crumpled to the ground, not knowing what had hit him!

"What about Les?" said the red-haired boy.

"What about him?"

"He'll want a gun when he sees ours."

"He'll have to go on wanting. If he's not keen enough to come with us on a job like this."

"'Tisn't that he's not keen," said the fat boy. "It's his old man. He's pretty strict. He locks his bedroom door now. Where can we practise, Rob?"

"I've got an idea about that," said the tall boy. "You know the old Sports Pavilion? The Home Guard used it in the war, but it's been shut up since."

The boys nodded.

"I found a way in at the back, from the railway. I'll show you. There's a sort of cellar with lockers in it. That'll do us fine. We'll have our first meeting there tomorrow. Right?"

"Right," they all said. The red-haired boy added, "How did you know about this place, Rob?"

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"My family used to live round here," said the tall boy. "Before my Ma died, when we moved up to Highside. As a matter of fact, I was at school about a quarter mile from here."

The fat boy said, "I bet I get a strapping from my old man when I get home. He don't like me being away all day."

"You're all right," said Winkle. "You're fat. It don't hurt so much when you're fat." He looked down with disgust at his own slender limbs.

It was nine o'clock at night nearly a month after that talk and in quite another part of London that Fishy Codlin was closing what he called his Antique Shop. This was a dark and rambling suite of rooms, full of dirt, woodworm, and the household junk of a quarter of a century. Codlin was in the front room, locking away the day's take when the two boys came in.

"You're too late," he growled. "I'm shut."

He noticed that the smaller of the boys stayed by the door, while the older came toward him with a curiously purposeful tread. He had a prevision of trouble and his hand reached out for the light switch.

"Leave it alone," said the boy. He was a half-seen figure in the dusk. All the light seemed to concentrate on the bright steel weapon in his hand. "Slip the bolt, Will," he added, but without taking his eyes off Codlin. "Now you stand away from the counter."

Codlin stood away. He thought for a moment of refusing, for there was nearly £25 in the box, the fruits of a full week's trading. But he was a coward as well as a bully and the gun looked real. He watched the notes disappearing in the boy's pocket. When one of the notes slipped to the floor the boy bent down and picked it up, but without ever removing his steady gaze from the old man.

When he had finished, the boy backed away to the door. "Stay put," he said. "And keep quiet for five minutes or you'll get hurt."

Then he was gone. Codlin breathed out an obscenity and jumped for the telephone. As he picked it up, "I warned you," said a gentle voice from the door. There was a noise like a small tire bursting and the telephone twisted round and clattered to the floor.

Codlin stood, staring stupidly at his hand. Splinters of vulcanite had grooved it, and the blood was beginning to drip. He cursed, foully and automatically. Footsteps were pattering away along the road outside. He let them get to the corner

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before he moved. He was taking no further chances. Then he lumbered across to the door, threw it open, and started bellowing.

Three streets away Detective Sergeant Petrella, homeward bound, heard two things at once. Distant shouts of outrage and, much closer at hand, light feet pattering on the pavement. He drew into the shadow at the side of the road and waited.

The two boys came round the corner, running easily, and laughing. When Petrella stepped out, the laughter ceased. Then the boys spun around and started to run the other way.

Petrella ran after them. He saw at once that he could not catch both, so he concentrated on the younger and slower boy. After a hundred yards he judged himself to be in distance and jumped forward in a tackle. It was high by the standards of Twickenham, but it was effective, and they went down, the boy underneath. As they fell, something dropped from the boy's pocket and slid, ringing and spinning, across the pavement.

"Of course you've got to charge him," said Haxtell later that night. "It's true Codlin can't really identify him, but the boy had a gun on him and he was running away from the scene of the crime. Who is he, by the way?"

"His name's Christopher Connolly. His father's a shunter at the goods depot. I've left them together for a bit, to see if the old man can talk some sense into him."

"Good idea," said Haxtell. "Can we get anything on the gun?"

"It's an air pistol. Therefore no registration number. And foreign. Newish. And a pretty high-powered job. If it's been stolen we might have it on the lists."

"Check it," said Haxtell. "What about his pockets?"

"Nothing except this." Petrella pushed across a scrap of paper. It had penciled on it: WILL BE AT USUAL PLACE 8 TONIGHT.

"What do you make of it?" said Haxtell.

"It depends," said Petrella cautiously, "if you think the dot after the first word is a full stop or just an accident."

Haxtell tried it both ways. "You mean it could be a plain statement: 'I will be at the usual place at eight o'clock tonight.' Or it could be an order, to someone called Will."

"Yes. And Codlin did say that he thought he heard the bigger boy address the smaller one as Will."

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"Is Connolly's name William?"

"No, sir. It's Christopher George. Known to his friends as Chris."

"What does he say about the paper?"

"Says I planted it on him. And the gun, of course."

"I often wonder," said Haxtell, "where the police keep all the guns they're supposed to plant on criminals. What about the other boy?"

"He says that there was no other boy. He says he was alone, and had been alone, all the evening."

"I see." Haxtell stared thoughtfully out of the window. He had a sharp nose for trouble.

"One bright spot," he said at last. "Codlin always marked his notes. Ever since he caught an assistant trying to dip into his till. He puts a letter C in indelible pencil on the back."

"That might be a help if we can catch the other boy," agreed Petrella. He added, "Haven't I heard that name Codlin before? Something about a dog."

"He tied his dog up," said Haxtell. "A nice old spaniel. And beat him with a golf club. Fined forty shillings. It was before your time."

"I must have read about it somewhere," said Petrella.

"And if you think," blared Haxtell, "that's any reason for not catching these—these young bandits—then I dare you to say it."

"Why, certainly not," said Petrella hastily.

"This is the third holdup in a fortnight. The third that's been reported to us. All with guns—or what looked like guns. Now we've caught one of them. We've *got* to get the names of the other boys out of him. For their sake as much as anything. Before someone really gets hurt."

"I expect the boy'll talk," said Petrella.

Haxtell nodded. Given time, boys usually talked.

But Christopher Connolly was an exception. For he said nothing, and continued to say nothing.

The next thing that happened, happened to old Mrs. Lightly, who lived alone in a tiny cottage above the waterworks. Her husband had been caretaker and she had retained the cottage by grace of the management as long as she paid the rent of ten shillings a week. Lately she had been getting irregular in her payments and she was now under notice to move.

The evening after the capture of Connolly, just after dark, she heard a noise down in her front

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hall. She was a spirited old lady and she came right out, carrying a candle to see what it was all about.

On the patched linoleum lay a fat envelope. Mrs. Lightly picked it up gingerly and carried it back to the sitting room. She got very few letters, and, in any case, the last mail had come and gone many hours earlier.

On the envelope, in penciled capital letters, were the words: EIGHT WEEKS RENT FROM SOME FRIENDS.

Mrs. Lightly set the candle down on the table and with fingers that trembled tore open the flap. A little wad of notes slid out. She counted them. Two pound notes and four ten-shilling notes. There was no shadow of doubt about it. It was four pounds. And that was eight weeks' rent.

Or, looked at in another way, suppose it was seven weeks' rent. That would have the advantage of leaving ten shillings over for a little celebration. The whole thing was clearly a miracle; and miracles are things which the devout are commanded to commemorate.

Mrs. Lightly placed the notes in the big black bag, folded the envelope carefully away behind a china dog on the mantelshelf, and got her best black hat out of the closet.

On the same evening, shortly after Mrs. Lightly left her cottage, four boys were sitting in the basement changing room of the old Sports Pavilion. A storm lantern, standing on a locker, shed a circle of clear white light around it, leaving the serious faces of the boys in shadow. The windows were carefully blacked out on the inside with cardboard and brown paper.

"I don't like it, Rob," the black-haired boy was saying. He was evidently repeating an old argument.

"What's wrong with it?" said the tall boy. He had a curiously gentle voice.

"Old Cator's what's wrong with it. He's a holy terror."

"He's a crook," said the fat boy.

The small boy said nothing. His eyes turned from one to the other as they spoke, but when no one was speaking they rested on the tall boy, full of trust and love.

"Isn't it crooks we're out to fix?" said the tall boy. "Isn't that right, Busty?"

"That's right," said the fat boy.

The black-haired boy said, "Hell, yes. But not just any crooks. Cator's got a night watchman. And he's a tough, too. As likely as not, they both carry guns."

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The tall boy said, "Are you afraid?"

"Of course I'm not afraid."

"Then what are we arguing about? There's four of us. And we've got two guns. There's two of them. When we pull the job, maybe only one'll be there. This is something we've *got* to do. We need the money."

"Another thing," said the black-haired boy. "Suppose we don't give quite so much away this time."

"You mean, keep some for ourselves?"

"That's right."

"What for?"

"I could think of ways to use it," said the black-haired boy, with a laugh. He looked round, but neither of the others had laughed with him. "All right," he said. "All right. I know the rules. Let's get this planned out."

"This is how it is, then," said the tall boy. "I reckon we'll have to wait about a week—" He demonstrated, on sheets of paper, with a pencil, and the four heads came close together, casting long shadows in the lamplight.

Next morning Petrella reported to Superintendent Haxtell the minor events of the night. There was a complaint from the Railway that some boys had broken a hole in the fence below the Sports Pavilion.

"Apart from that," said Petrella, "a beautiful calm seems to have fallen on Highside. Oh—apart from Mrs. Lightly."

"Mrs. Lightly?"

"Old Lightly's widow. The one who lives in the cottage next to the waterworks."

"Was that the one there was a bit in the papers about how she couldn't pay her rent?"

"That's right," said Petrella. "Only she got hold of some money and that's what the drinking was about. It was a celebration. She seems to have drunk her way steadily along the High Street. Mostly gin, but a certain amount of stout to help it down. She finished by busting a shop window with an empty bottle."

"Where'd she get the money from?"

"That's the odd thing. She was flat broke. Faced with eviction, and no one very sympathetic, because they knew that as soon as she got any money she'd drink it up. Then an angel dropped in, with four quid in an envelope."

"An angel?"

"That's what she says. A disembodied spirit. It popped an envelope through the letter box with four ten-shilling notes and two pound notes in it."

"How much of it was left when you picked her up?"

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"About two pounds ten," said Petrella.

"I don't see anything odd in all that," said Haxtell. "Some crackpot reads in the papers that the old girl's short of money and how her landlord's persecuting her, and he makes her an anonymous donation, which she promptly spends on getting plastered."

"Yes, sir," said Petrella. He added gently, "I've seen the notes she *didn't* spend. They're all marked on the back with a C in indelible pencil."

"They're *what*?"

"That's right, sir."

"It's mad."

"It's a bit odd, certainly," said Petrella. Something, a note almost of smugness in his voice, made the Superintendent look up. "Have you got some line on this?"

"I think I might be able to trace those notes back to the boy who's been running this show."

"Then we don't waste any time talking about it," said Haxtell. "We need results and we need 'em quickly." He added, with apparent inconsequence, "I'm seeing Barstow this afternoon."

Petrella's hopes, such as they were, derived from the envelope, which he had duly recovered from behind the china dog on Mrs. Lightly's mantelshelf. The name and address had been cut out, but two valuable pieces of information had been left behind. The first was the name *Strangeway's* printed in the top left-hand corner. The second was the postmark, the date on which was still legible.

Petrella knew Strangeway's. It was a shop that sold cameras and photographic equipment, and he guessed that its daily output of letters would not be large. There was a chance, of course, that the envelope had been picked up casually. But equally, there was a chance that it had not.

Happily, the manager of Strangeway's was a methodical man. He consulted his daybook and produced for Petrella a list of names and addresses. "I think," he said, "that those would be all the firm's letters that went out that day. They would be bills or receipts. I may have written one or two private letters, but I'd have no record of them."

"But they wouldn't be in your firm's envelope."

"They might be. If they went to suppliers."

"I'll try these first," said Petrella.

There were a couple of dozen names on the list. Most of the addresses were in Highside or Helenwood.

It was no use inventing an

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elaborate story. He was too well known locally to pretend to be an insurance salesman. He decided on a simple lie.

To the gray-haired old lady who opened the door to him at the first address he said, "We're checking the election register. The lists are getting out of date. Have you any children in the house who might come of age in the next five years?"

"There's Jimmy," said the woman.

"Who's Jimmy?"

She explained about Jimmy. He was a real terror. Aged about nineteen. Just as Petrella was getting interested in Jimmy she added that he'd been in Canada for a year.

Petrella took down copious details about Jimmy. It all took time, but if you were going to deal in lies, it was well to act them out.

That was the beginning of a long day's work. Early in the evening he came to Number 11 Parham Crescent. The house was no different from a million others of the brick boxes that encrust the surface of London's northern heights.

The door was opened by a gentleman in shirtsleeves, who agreed that his name was Brazier and admitted having a sixteen-and-a-half-year-old son named Robert.

"Robert Brazier?"

"Robert Humphreys. He's my sister's son. She's been dead two years. He lives here—*when* he's home."

Petrella picked up the lead with the skill of long experience. Was Robert often away from home?

Mr. Brazier obliged with a discourse on modern youth. Boys nowadays, Petrella gathered, were very unlike what boys used to be when he—Mr. Brazier—had been young. They lacked reverence for their elders, thought they knew all the answers, and preferred to go their own ways. "Sometimes I don't see him all day. Sometimes two days running. He could be out all night for all I know. It's not right —Mr.—um—"

Petrella agreed that it wasn't right. Mr. Brazier suffered from bad breath, which made listening to him an ordeal. However, he elicited some details. One of them was the name of the South London school that Robert had left eighteen months before.

Petrella did some telephoning, and the following morning he caught a bus and trundled down to Southwark to have a word with Mr. Wetherall, the headmaster of the South Borough Secondary School for Boys. Mr. Wetherall was a small spare man with a beaky

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nose and he had been wrestling for a quarter of a century with the tough precocious youths who live south of the river. The history of his struggles was grooved into his leathery face. He cheerfully took time off to consider Petrella's problems; all the more so when he discovered what was wanted.

"Robert Humphreys," he said. "I had a bet with my wife that I'd hear that name again before long."

"Now you've won it, sir."

"Yes," said Mr. Wetherall. He gazed reflectively round his tiny overcrowded study, then said, "This is a big school, you know. And I've been here, with one short break, for more than ten years. Maybe two thousand boys. And out of all that two thousand I could count on the fingers of one hand—without using the thumb—the ones whom I call natural leaders. And of those few I'm not sure I wouldn't put Robert Humphreys first."

Mr. Wetherall added, "I'll tell you a story about him. While he was here, we were planning to convert a building into a gymnasium. I'd got all the governors on my side except the Chairman, Colonel Bond. He was opposed to spending the money, and until I'd won him over I couldn't move.

"One day the Colonel disappeared. He's a bachelor who spends most of his time at his Club. No one was unduly worried. He missed a couple of governors' meetings, which was unusual.

"Then I got a letter. From the Colonel. It simply said that he had been thinking things over and had decided that we ought to go ahead with our gym. He himself wouldn't be able to attend meetings for some time, as his health had given way."

Petrella goggled at him. "Are you telling me—?" he said.

"That's right," said Mr. Wetherall calmly. "The boys had kidnaped him. Robert organized the whole thing. They picked him up in a truck, and kept him in a loft, over an old stable. Guarded him, fed him, looked after him. And when they'd induced him to write that letter they let him out."

"How did they disguise themselves?"

"They made no attempt to disguise themselves. They calculated, and rightly, that if the Colonel made a fuss people would never stop laughing at him. The Colonel had worked the sum out too, and got the same answer. He never said a word about it. In fact, it was Humphreys who told me. It was then that I made my confident prediction. Downing Street or the Old Bailey."

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"I'm afraid it may be the Old Bailey," said Petrella unhappily.

"It was an even chance," said Mr. Wetherall. "He was devoted to his mother. If she hadn't died, I believe there's hardly any limit to what he might have done. He's with an uncle now. Not a very attractive man."

"I've met him," said Petrella. As he was going he said, "Did you get your gym?"

"I'll show it to you as we go," said Mr. Wetherall. "One of the finest in South London."

It took another whole day for Petrella to finish his inquiries, but now that the clue was in his hand it was not difficult to find the heart of the maze. It had been a day of blazing heat; by nine o'clock that night when he faced Superintendent Haxtell, hardly a breath was moving.

"There are four of them," he said. "Five with Chris Connolly, the one we caught. First, there's a boy called Robert Humphreys. His first lieutenant's Brian Baker, known as Busty."

"A fat boy," said Haxtell. "Rather a good footballer. His father's a pro."

"Correct. The third one is Les Miller."

"Sergeant Miller's boy?"

"I'm afraid so, sir."

The two men looked at each other. Sergeant Miller was Petrella's opposite number at Pond End Police Station.

"Go on," said Haxtell grimly.

"The fourth, and much the youngest, is one of the Harrington boys. The one they call Winkle. His real name's Eric, or Ricky. There seems to be no doubt that the air guns they've been using were stolen from a shop in Southwark, which is, incidentally, where Humphreys went to school."

"And Humphreys is the leader?"

"I don't think there's any doubt about that at all, sir. In fact, the whole thing is a rather elaborate game made up by him."

"A game," said Haxtell, pulling out a handkerchief and wiping the sweat from his forehead.

"Of Robin Hood. That's why they used those names. Fat Brian was Friar Tuck, red-headed Chris was Will Scarlet, Les was the Miller's son. And Ricky was Allen-a-Dale. Robert, of course, was Robin. I believe that historically—"

"I'm not interested in history. And you can dress it up what way you like. It doesn't alter the fact that they're gangsters."

"There were two points about them," said Petrella. "I'm not

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suggesting it's any sort of mitigation. But they really did adhere to the ideas of their originals. They didn't rob old women or girls—and they're usually the number-one target for juvenile delinquents."

Haxtell grunted.

"They chose people they thought needed robbing." Petrella caught the look in his superior's eye and hurried on. "And they didn't spend the money on themselves. They gave it away. All of it, as far as I can make out. To people they thought needed it. More like the real Robin Hood than the synthetic version. Hollywood's muddled it up for us.

"You hear the kids saying, 'Feared by the bad. Loved by the good.' But that wasn't really the way of it. Robin Hood didn't rob people because they were bad. He assumed they were bad because they were rich. He was an early Communist."

Petrella stopped, aware that he had outrun discretion.

"Go on," said Haxtell grimly.

"Of course, he's got idealized now," Petrella concluded defiantly. "But I should think the authorities thought *he* was a pretty fair nuisance—when he was actually operating—wouldn't you?"

"And you suggest, perhaps, that we allow them to continue their altruistic work of redistributing the wealth of North London?"

"Oh, no, sir. We've got to stop them."

"Why, if they're doing so much good?"

"Before they get hurt. As you said yourself."

Haxtell was spared the necessity of answering by a clatter of feet in the corridor and a resounding knock at the door. It was Detective Sergeant Miller, and he had his son with him.

"Good evening, Miller," said Haxtell. "I was half expecting you."

"I've brought my boy along," said Sergeant Miller. He was white with fury. "He's got something he's going to tell you."

The boy had been crying, but was calm enough now. "It's Humphreys and the others," he said. "They're going to do Cator's Garage tonight. I wouldn't agree to it. So they turned me out of the band. So I told Dad."

Just so, thought Petrella, had all great dynasties fallen. He was aware of a prickling sensation, a crawling of the skin, not entirely accounted for by the onrush of events. He looked out of the window and saw that a storm had crept up on them. Even as he watched, the first

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thread of lightning flicked out and in, like an adder's tongue, among the banked black clouds.

Les Miller was demonstrating something on the table.

"They've found a way in round the back. They get across the canal on the old broken bridge, climb the bank, and get in a window of an outhouse, which leads into the garage. There's a watchman, but they reckon they can rush him from behind and get his keys off him. Cator keeps a lot of his money in the garage."

Petrella said, "I expect that's right, sir. We've had our eyes on that gentleman for some time. If he's in the hot-car racket he'd have no use for checks or a bank account."

"We'd better warn Cator," said Haxtell, "and get a squad car round there quick. What time's the operation due to start?"

Before the boy could answer, the telephone sounded. Haxtell picked off the receiver, listened a moment, and said, "Don't do anything. We'll be right around," and to the others, "It has started. That was the watchman. He's knocked one boy out cold."

As Petrella ran for the car the skies opened and he was wet to the skin before he reached the car.

Outside Cator's Garage, a rambling conglomeration of buildings backing on the canal, they skidded to a halt, nearly ramming a big green limousine coming from the opposite direction. Herbert Cator jumped out, pounded up the cinder path ahead of them, and thumped on the door.

The man who opened the door looked like a boxer gone badly to seed. The right side of his face was covered with blood, from a badly torn ear and a scalp wound. He was holding a long steel poker in one hand. "Glad you've got here," said the man. "Three of the little scum. I got one of 'em."

He jerked his head toward the corner where fat Friar Tuck lay on his face, on the oil-dank floor.

"Where are the others?" said Haxtell.

"In there." He pointed to the heavy door that led through to the main workshop. "Don't you worry. They won't get out of there in a hurry. The windows are all barred."

Haxtell walked across, slipped the bolt, and threw the door open.

It was a big room, two stories tall. The floor space was jammed with cars in every stage of dismemberment. The top was a clutter of hoisting and lifting tackle, dim above the big overhead lights.

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"Come out of there, both of you."

"The big one's got a gun," said the watchman. "He nearly shot my ear off."

"Keep away then," said Haxtell. He turned back again and said in a booming voice, "Come on, Humphreys. And you, Harrington. The place is surrounded."

As if in defiant answer came a sudden deafening crash of thunder. And then all the lights went out.

"Damnation," said Haxtell. Over his shoulder to Petrella and Miller he said, "Bring all the torches we've got in the car. And the spotlight, if the flex is long enough—"

Cator said, "Hold it a moment. Something's alight." A golden-white sheet of flame shot up from the back of the room. Cator said thickly, "They've set fire to the garage, the devils."

In the sudden light Petrella saw the boys. They were crouching together on an overhead latticework gantry. Cator saw them, too. His hand went down and came up. There was the roar of a gun, once, twice, before anyone could get at him. Then Petrella was moving.

The light showed him the iron ladder that led upward. He flung himself at it and went up. Then along the narrow balcony. When he reached the place where he had seen them, the boys had gone. He stood for a moment. Already the heat was becoming painful. Then, ahead of him, he saw the door to the roof. It was swinging open.

As he reached it the whole of the interior of the room went up behind him in a hot white belch of flame.

Out on the roof he found the boys. Ricky Harrington was on his knees, beside Humphreys. The flames, pouring through the opening, lit the scene with cruel light.

Petrella knelt down beside him. One look was enough.

"He's dead, ent he?" said Ricky, in a curiously composed voice.

"Yes," said Petrella. "And unless the fire engine comes damned quick, he's going to have company in the next world."

The boy said, "I don't want no one to rescue me." He ran to the side of the building, vaulted the low coping, and disappeared. Petrella hurled himself after him.

He was just in time to see the miracle. Uncaring what happened to him, Ricky had landed with a soft splash in the waters of the North Side Canal.

"If he can do it, I can," said Petrella. "Roast or drown." He jumped. The world turned

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slowly in one complete fiery circle, and then his mouth was full of water.

He rose to the surface, spitting. There was no sign of the boy. Petrella tried to think. They had jumped from the same spot. There was no current. He must be there. Must be within a few yards.

He took a deep breath, turned over, and duck-dived. His fingers scrabbled across filth, broken crockery, and the sharper edges of cans. When he could bear it no longer he came up.

At the third attempt his fingers touched clothing. He slithered for a foothold in the mud and pulled. The small body came with him, unresisting.

A minute later he had it on the flat towpath. He was on the far side of the river, but even so he had to stagger twenty or thirty yards and turn the corner of the wall to escape the searing blast of the heat.

Then he dumped his burden and started to work, savagely, intently fighting for the life under his hands.

It was five minutes before Ricky stirred. Then he rolled onto his side and was sick.

"What's happened?" he said.

"You're all right," said Petrella. "We'll look after you."

"Not me, him." Then he seemed to remember, and sat still.

In the sudden silence Petrella heard a distant and plaintive bugle note. He knew that it was only the hooter, from the goods depot, but for a moment it had sounded like a horn being blown in a lonely glade; blown for the followers who would not come.

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a *NEW* short story by

JOYCE HARRINGTON

After twenty years he would find her and get a job and they would live in the green and white house and he would be proud of her and happy—after twenty years. . .

IT NEVER HAPPENED

by JOYCE HARRINGTON

"It never happened," the little man told himself as he walked around the city. But the city had changed. Old landmarks were gone; familiar hangouts had undergone hostile face lifts. There was nowhere he could rest. So he walked, dry lips keeping time with shuffling feet, telling himself that none of it had ever happened and that somewhere in the city he would find her.

New hard-angled buildings with icily reflective fronts shot back his own face, lined and fringed with skimpy gray. He couldn't bear to look, but his reflection caught him unaware a hundred times, telling him, "This is how you look, old man. This is how the world sees you." The face, thin and yellowish, the sunken eyes flat with the boring years. The shoulders sloping inward as if to guard the concave chest. The clothes of hard cheap material that covered the body but sagged and wrinkled grotesquely. And always, at the end of his right arm, the zipper bag. A bag such as young men carry when going for a workout in the gymnasium. The bag was brown and new and its zipper shiny.

The little man crossed the square where the fountain spewed jets of water from the mouths of iron dolphins. People sat on the rim of the fountain and on benches and low concrete walls. It was a fine day and many of them ate ice-cream cones. The little man moved slowly among them, never stopping, always looking.

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Especially at the women. But she wasn't there. He really didn't expect her to be there, but he kept looking anyway.

The girls in the square were pretty, but strange. Their clothes were garish and immodest. It was a warm day, but even so, the little man did not think it suitable that so much bare skin should be displayed in the city. On the beach, perhaps, but not here. She would never go about dressed like that — rather, undressed like that. You could say a lot of things against her: she was impatient, she had a vicious temper, she was greedy and selfish and ambitious. But she kept all this hidden under a ladylike veneer of good manners and fine clothing.

He knew all this about her, but still he loved her and had never been ashamed of her in public. In private she was shrewish and wanton, whining about his deficiencies — not enough money, not enough time at home — while tantalizing him with half-open kimonos or transparent negligees.

When they were with other people, with his fellow traveling salesmen and their wives, she always made him feel so proud. In her demure dresses of pale blue or dusty rose she made the other women seem coarse and vulgar. And when she laughed at the inevitable salesmen's jokes, it was a mock-reproachful chuckle behind a perfectly manicured hand. A real lady, they had called her. They never knew that behind their backs she sneered at them in language coarser than their own.

The little man left the square and jaywalked against the stream of sluggishly moving one-way traffic. When had they made the streets one-way? While he was away. The cars had changed, too. Before he went away he knew every make and model on the road. They were distinctive with their fins and chrome. Now they all looked alike, plain and square and small. And not a Cadillac in sight. Did they still make Cadillacs? Oh, sure. A thing like that didn't just disappear. There would always be people in the Cadillac class. As he had been at one time.

Well, not quite. He'd had the Caddy all right. It was good business for a salesman on the road to look prosperous. So, the cream-colored convertible with the buttery soft leather seats and the glistening fins. Never mind that the trunk compartment was full of sample cases instead of golf clubs or tennis rackets. He wondered what had happened to the car. Maybe she still had it. Maybe if he stood

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on a street corner long enough, she would drive by all pink and blonde in the long creamy car and he would call out to her, "Marilyn! Marilyn, honey!" And she would stop. And he would get in. And they would drive off together, and none of it would have ever happened.

"No!" He said the word aloud and shook his head for emphasis. He couldn't make it work that way. He mumbled over the dim memory of signing papers that had to do with the sale of the car. It was a long time ago and the money was long gone. He couldn't bring it back by standing on a street corner. Anyway, the car was probably junk by now. Smashed, crashed, trashed. He wouldn't have kept it more than another year. Which year was that? "Smashed!" He punched the zipper bag. "Crashed!" Punch. "Trashed!" Punch.

People were looking at him. And smirking. He could see their smirks through the backs of their heads as they walked away from him. More smirks coming at him from both directions. "Trash!" he mean-mouthed dangerously. "Smash you trash!" And he ducked inside a cafeteria.

The food steam gathered in the back of his throat and squashed his hunger. He grabbed a tray and shoved it along the steel track. When it stopped, he pointed to an oblong pan filled with gobbets of something swimming in gravy. A cup of coffee. Ninety-five cents plus tax. In his wallet there remained two one-dollar bills. In his pocket there were a few coins. His room was paid for till the end of the week. Three more days. He would have to find a job. But first he would have to find Marilyn.

He carried the tray to a table near the window. He didn't quite trust the chairs. Too-thin plastic on spindly metal legs, they looked as if they would collapse even under his negligible weight. He sat, worried, facing the window. The chair held firm. The little man forked food into his mouth and sifted the passers-by. The zipper bag squatted quietly between his feet.

The little man ate everything on his plate, but could not have said what it was. He drank his coffee, and still he sat looking out the window when a waitress came to take his tray. Her uniform was pink and her hair was yellow. She dabbed at the table with a gray cloth, knocking crumbs into his lap. He saw that she was tiny and slender, and her face was young and sad.

He said, "Marilyn?"

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"Her day off."

"Where is she?"

"How should I know?" She looked at him, seeing the cheap suit and the flat eyes. "Who wants to know?" Suspiciously.

"Never mind. A mistake is all." He scrambled to his feet and away to the door. The zipper bag swung, bumping against his leg.

How could he have thought the waitress was Marilyn? Marilyn would be older now. How would he find her if she'd changed as much as he had? He tried to see Marilyn old: fat, gray, wrinkled, wearing a sloppy faded house dress. No. Marilyn wouldn't let herself go. Her hair would still be blonde and cut in that cute way. What did she call it? Poodle-cut. She would still wear those sweet little girl dresses, with ruffles and petticoats. Sexy as all get out when you thought about what was underneath.

The little man hurried along the crowded streets, peering into faces, examining backs, shoulders, legs. All too long, too tall, too dark, too round, too ugly to be Marilyn. He was tired, and the zipper bag dragged on his arm like a dead weight.

Home. A tiny room with a bed, a dresser, a chair. He lay on the bed — the zipper bag was on the chair — and thought about home. He'd gone there the first day back, taking a taxi. Stupidly supposing that Marilyn would still be there. The place looked different. Trees where there had been no trees, roses blooming against the rail fence. He remembered the house as white with green trim. Now it was buff with brown trim. But the house number was the same, and so was the bedroom window that stared down at him from the second floor. He rang the bell, feeling displaced and excited. The woman who answered the door was young and tall. She wore glasses and had long brown hair.

"Mrs. Sampson?"

"No. I'm Mrs. Burke."

Oh, the stupid twit. Couldn't she understand? He knew she wasn't Marilyn. He was only asking where Marilyn was.

"What I mean is, Mrs. Sampson used to live here. I was wondering if you knew where she went."

"Sampson? Oh, no. We bought the house from some people named Smiley. We've only been here a year. When did Mrs. Sampson live here?"

"Long time ago. I thought she might still — I've been away, out of touch." He was backing away, feeling the bedroom window staring down at him. "I need to find her."

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"The Smileys might know. But they moved to California. Maybe I can find their address."

"No. Don't bother. They won't know. I'll find her. She'll be around somewhere. She wouldn't go away."

He turned and ran down the driveway and then all the way to the bus stop. It was when he got back to town that he stopped in a sporting-goods store and got the zipper bag.

A room with a bed, a dresser, a chair. He lay on the bed and got out his wallet. Creased with age and smelling musty. They'd given it back to him just the way they'd taken it from him. Stuffed with all the bits of paper that told him who he was. One by one he took them out, fingered them, laid them aside. Long-expired driver's license with a description that didn't match any more. A few yellowing business cards: E. R. "Gene" Sampson, Sales Representative. Who was this E. R. "Gene" Sampson and what did he sell?

The little man couldn't remember. No one had called him "Gene" for a long time. "Shorty." "Shrimp." Other names, obscene and terrifying, that he didn't like to recall. Nor what he'd had to sell or trade for protection. No, that didn't bear thinking about.

Back to the wallet. Slips of paper. Phone numbers, scribbled appointments. None of them striking any chord of memory. What would happen if he called one of those numbers? Or kept an appointment twenty years late? Would they remember him? Would it help him find Marilyn? He dropped the papers and cards into the wastebasket.

The pictures. Marilyn in a bathing suit, smiling. Marilyn sitting in the car, waving like a parade queen. Marilyn and a man, hand in hand. Who was he, that young man with the dark wavy hair and the air of confidence? He turned the snapshot over. On the back in faded ink: Marilyn and Gene, April, 1952. He couldn't remember who had taken the picture. But that was the way it had been, he and Marilyn together, until — they took him away.

They said he'd killed her. That was nonsense. If they only knew how much he loved her, they'd know he could never have harmed her. They said he'd come home unexpectedly from a business trip and found Marilyn and somebody, a man, in the bedroom. Well, if they knew Marilyn, they would have understood that she was too fastidious to do anything that sordid. Besides, she loved him,

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E. R. "Gene" Sampson, and was his wife, and that was enough for him.

True, she didn't like his having to travel so much in the line of business, but she understood that he had to do it. Because he wanted to buy her all the pretty things she loved. And how grateful and loving she always was whenever he brought her some expensive little trinket. So the police were mistaken when they said that he'd found her with a man, and there'd been an argument and Marilyn was dead.

Still, he'd often wondered over the years why she hadn't come forward at the trial, or even afterward, and told them all how silly they were. He'd had a lot of time to think about that. Sometimes he thought it must have been the publicity. Marilyn would have hated having her picture in the paper, unless it was on the society page.

Then again, he thought she must have been ill, lying in a hospital somewhere, unconscious and unaware of his trouble. By the time she recovered he had already been put away and she knew nothing of his arrest and trial and conviction. She must have thought he'd deserted her. That would account for the fact that he'd never received a single letter from her. No letter, no visit. She just hadn't known where he was.

The judge had been lenient. No death sentence for E. R. "Gene" Sampson. There were mitigating circumstances. Even a possibility of parole. His lawyer had been unhappy with him. Because he wouldn't pretend to be insane. Was it insanitiy to say you had no recollection of a quarrel with your wife, or of a struggle with a gun, or of Marilyn bleeding out her life on the white-shag bedroom rug, when none of it had ever happened? Wouldn't he remember if it had? No one could forget a thing like that.

That was why he had to find her. To prove to himself — no one else mattered any more — that none of it had happened. He would find her and get a job and they would live in the green and white house and he would be proud of her and happy.

The little man stirred uneasily on the bed. It might be a bit tricky to get a job. Somehow he couldn't see himself traveling from city to city, confidently opening his sample cases, and writing up thousands of dollars' worth of orders. But that was what he knew how to do — that, and bake bread. He'd spent the last twenty years in the prison bakery. They'd given him the names of a couple of

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bakeries that might be willing to take him on. But how would he be able to take care of Marilyn on what he could earn in a bakery?

Find her first, he thought. The rest he would manage somehow. But in order to find her he would have to have a plan. No good to walk the streets as he'd been doing, hoping to see her and in the process wearing himself out. He would have to go where she would most likely be.

He remembered how she loved to go shopping. No sooner would he get home from a trip than she would say, "Let's go shopping." And he would take her downtown. They would wander through a department store, up the escalators, floor by floor. She would buy stockings and try on dresses for his approval.

On every floor packages would be added to those he carried. Until at last they reached the top floor, the place she loved best. The model rooms. Here she would enter each showplace and pretend it was her own. She would sit in the chairs, bounce on the beds, admire herself in the mirrors. And always she would find something that was just right for their own green and white house. She would say, "Oh, I must have it. Please, Gene, dear?" And he would say, "Whatever you want, Marilyn honey." Even though it meant more time on the road, away from her.

The little man hauled himself off the bed, buttoned his ill-fitting jacket, and picked up the zipper bag.

The escalators rose smoothly, but the little man felt chasms beneath his feet and clung to the handrail. Some boys were walking up the down escalator, going nowhere and laughing. The little man was tempted to do the same — turn around and walk down the rising staircase until they stopped the mechanism and carried him off. It wasn't a game, but the boys didn't know that yet. There was safety in a treadmill. If you didn't get anywhere, still you didn't risk anything.

He passed through the crowds, steadily rising. Blazing colors and outlandish shapes glided past him. Look at this! Buy this! Around him the people rushed and the long gray years behind him seemed orderly and safe by comparison. Still he rose, floor by floor. To turn around required making a decision, something he hadn't done in twenty years.

Spewed out on the top floor, the little man staggered to a chair and sat shivering in the

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chill-conditioned air. He hugged the zipper bag to the weakness that fluttered under his heart. Now that he was here, would she appear? How long could he sit watching the heads that rose up from the escalator shaft, waiting for the blonde one that would make everything all right? A salesman approached, soft-footed on carpet.

"Can I help you, sir?"

"No. Thanks. I'm waiting for — my wife."

The salesman left, but watched him from a discreet distance, knowingly evaluating his inability to buy so much as a lampshade. When the weakness melted from the little man's cramped muscles, he rose and began touring the model rooms. He was afraid of missing Marilyn when she got off the escalator, but he was equally afraid of being thrown out as a loiterer. Better to move around. Once Marilyn arrived, she wouldn't leave in a hurry. She always took her time, prowling from room to room.

The little man now did the same. Studiously he regarded cheerful nurseries, elegant dining rooms, dignified living rooms. The colors swarmed into his eyes and the price tags made him gasp. How would he be able to provide all this for Marilyn? How explain to her his incapacity?

He began to hope she wouldn't appear. Perhaps he should leave before she arrived. She need never know that he'd returned. He almost wept at the thought of never seeing her again, but her certain scorn at his poverty convinced him he should leave.

The little man stepped into the long corridor between the rooms. He would take the elevator down, go back to his room, and sleep. Tomorrow he would find a job, any job, and try to forget about Marilyn. Which way to the elevator? At one end of the corridor the salesman stood, legs apart, hands loosely held behind his back. The stance of a prison guard. The little man turned.

At the other end of the corridor the model bedrooms branched off to the right. He started in that direction, anxious to be gone before Marilyn could see him.

The bedroom at the end of the corridor was illuminated like a stage setting. As the little man drew closer, the coarse threads of its white-shag carpet took on definition. The rose-colored drapes at the window would, when opened, reveal a second-floor view of a lawn and a driveway. The crystal lamps with frilly shades were lit and cast their rosy gleam on her perfume bottles. The bed was

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neatly covered with the ruffled rose spread. There was no one in the bedroom.

And then there was. Before the little man could reach the end of the corridor, she came out of the side lane. Too late! In a moment she would see him. She skipped into the bedroom, uttering little cries of delight. Of course she would. Hadn't she chosen it all herself? She whirled on her toes, and her wide rosy skirt lifted slightly giving him a glimpse of ruffled petticoat beneath. She stopped before the gilt mirror and patted a blonde curl into position. And then she turned and looked out of the room. Straight at him.

The little man stood very still, trying to be invisible. He needn't have bothered. Her eyes slid past him into the side lane. She smiled and called. A young man strode out of the side lane and into the bedroom. He was tall and his clothes fitted well and looked expensive. He came to her and put an arm around her waist. They spoke and she smiled lovingly into his face. Then they went to the rose-covered bed, sat on it, bounced, and laughed. And the young man kissed her.

So. Nothing had changed. The little man watched as he had watched once before. And as before they didn't see him, so delighted were they with each other.

The little man trembled. With a shaking hand he opened the zipper bag. Standing in the corridor with the bag in one hand, the gun in the other, the little man took aim and fired.

When the sound died away there was silence. Just before the silence she sat up quite astonished, then swayed backward and toppled off the bed. During the silence her blood began to spread onto the white-shag rug.

The silence ended with shrieks and the sound of running feet. The little man walked into the bedroom, drew aside the rose-pink drapes, and looked out the window.

The little man punched the dough and shaped it into loaves. It was satisfying work. The dough resisted just enough to give a touch of challenge to the task. The dusting of flour on his hands pleased him — it looked like clean white gloves. The little man shaped loaf after loaf and took pride in their sameness.

"Hey, Shorty," whispered the man working next to him. "How was it outside? What's happening on the street?"

"Nothing," replied the little man. "Nothing happened at all."

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In case you missed S. S. Rafferty's "The Margrave of Virginia" in last month's issue—the first of an important new series—let us repeat the substance of our editorial preface.

The Declaration of Independence (more accurately, the Declaration of Separation) was adopted by the Continental Congress in Philadelphia on July 4, 1776. On July 4, 1976 the United States of America will celebrate the bicentennial of that grand and glorious document. EQMM's contribution to the commemorative event will be a series of pre-Revolutionary War detective stories, each tale representing one of the thirteen colonies, with Captain Jeremy Cork investigating "social puzzles" pertinent to the years preceding the war that won this country its political freedom . . .

The second story in the series concerns the twin Pharos at Point Judith, Rhode Island, in the autumn of 1736. The two Pharos, or lighthouses, were suggested to the author by the twin-light structure that was built in Plymouth in 1768, although the Plymouth lighthouse was only a seamark, not a light-in-one double tower.

Lighthouses, as the author tells us, "were romantic symbols to many colonials, as well as a source for horror tales about keepers driven mad by the pounding waves and about strange murders in terrifying storms . . . Benjamin Franklin at 13 wrote two ballads about lighthouses and sold them in the streets of Boston."

This second story tests to the utmost Captain Cork's skills as a colonial criminologist. As both detector and defense counsel, Captain Cork attacks the mystery on three fronts, in a case of "surprises, dejections, and finally, of an uncanny solution" . . .

"Q"

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THE RHODE ISLAND LIGHTS

by S. S. RAFFERTY

The autumn of 1736 was kind indeed to the coast of the northern colonies. Normally expected foul winds and fouler weather turned out to be a cool, clear sky and a placid sea lapping gently like a puppy against the eddyrock from Boston to New York. For the first time in 18 months, Captain Jeremy Cork and I were once again ensconced in our natural surroundings at the Oar and Eagle at Sea Bluff on the Connecticut littoral.

"Well, by jing," I said, opening the letters that had come by the post rider early that evening, "it appears that your social puzzles have produced some coin at last."

He was sitting at what he euphemistically calls his "work" table, absorbed in a newly-arrived book from England. He looked up and grunted a slight note of interest.

"You remember Squire Delaney of the Rhode Island colony?"

"Of course, Oaks. We helped him in the Narragansett Pacer affair."

"Yes; well, he has seen fit to give your spermacite candle factory in Warwick a substantial contract. It's rather astounding, though. What could he possibly do with two-pound candles? My God, it says here, 'For delivery to the Pharos at Point Judith.' Could Delaney have fallen in with some pagan ritual?"

Cork closed the book and looked up at me with that smirk-a-mouth he uses when he is about to jape me. "Perhaps we ought to refuse the contract. We wouldn't want to be party to the Dark Arts, hey?"

Now there you have it. As Cork's financial yeoman, I am patiently building him an empire of holdings that may some day make him the richest man in the Americas. However, it is part of his sport to ignore my efforts and waste his time in the solution of crimes, which he calls "social puzzles." He has other unprofitable pastimes which are not mentionable in Christian company. This present piece of sarcasm about refusing the Delaney contract was a backhanded reminder that I once proposed the importation of shrunken heads from Spanish America. I said, give the public what it wants, but he was against it.

"I didn't say 'Dark Arts,' sir, you did. I was merely curious

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about the use of so large a candle, and in such quantity."

"Actually, Oaks, I am guilty of bad imagery. White Arts would have been a better choice."

I looked at him querulously, and he went on, "Even in the absence of all the information, we have the thread of the tapestry. Where does the good Squire live?"

"In the Rhode Island colony."

"More specifically, at Point Judith, does he not?"

"Yes, he owns his horse ranch, as he calls it, and everything in sight."

"And does not Point Judith's recent notoriety bring anything to mind?"

"Of course, the shipwrecks! Four, over the summer, I believe. Shifting sandbars and tricky shoals, the *Gazette* reported."

"And here we have a wealthy, public-spirited man ordering immense candles—"

"A lighthouse! He's building a lighthouse."

"Or Pharos, as mariners term it. But if he is now ordering his light source, I would guess that the Pharos is already built. Now that is something I want to see."

With *The Hawkers*, the ship he owns but never sails in, away to the Indies, we were forced to make the trip overland, and arrived at the Delaney ranch three days later.

I must point out here that our party also included Tunxis, a tame Quinnipiac, who serves as Cork's shadow and as my vexation. Although he speaks passable English, the Indian always talks to Cork in Injun jabber, and a three-day trip spent with two men laughing over incomprehensible jokes is not my recommendation for pleasant travel.

I once heard a back-stair rumour that Cork was related to the Quinnipiac by blood. I would have no truck with that notion. However, when observing Cork's demeanour once he entered the woods and wild, I admit to some doubts. He and Tunxis possess uncanny hearing, and I swear their sense of smell is even better than their eyesight. Perhaps it is these underlying animal instincts that give Cork his reputation as a detector.

In any case, I spent three days ahorse with two boys on a frolic with Nature.

In a previous visit to the Delaneys, I marvelled at the luxury of their center-hall mansion. It had changed only for the better, now sprouting another wing. This annex, I assumed, was to accommo-

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date the issue of the ever-fruitful Madame Delaney. As we were to learn later, the Delaneys, having produced seven brawny sons, were now one shy of matching that mark with females.

We arrived at dinnertime, but were not in peril of taking pot-luck. At the Delaney table it is always pot-wealth. There was the normal complement of cod chowder, steamed lobster and clams, and, of course, great hot bowls of succotash and pork. But, good-wife that she was, Madame Delaney also served one of the original dishes for which she is justly famous. On this evening it was a platter of succulent squabs, which were as curious as they were delicious. Under Cork's prodding, she told us that they were spit-roasted and basted with a pungent, salty liquor used in China, called sauce of soy. I know little of the Chinese, but their bellies must be content. Since Tunxis refuses to eat or sleep under a roof, he took his repast outdoors.

Later we were sitting in the drawing room with clay bowls and mugs of Delaney's usquebaugh, a potent corn liquor of dark Scotch-Irish reputation, when I brought up a point that had bothered me since we arrived.

"When we turned into your property, Squire, I could see two towers far off on the Point. Yet your order said a Pharos."

"Technical terminology, Oaks," Cork cut in. "One or several lights in one place are considered a unit, and referred to in the singular. I assume, Squire, that you have gone to the expense of two towers to give sailors a seamark that is clearly different from others along the coast."

"That and more," the Irishman said.

"Is it worth doubling the investment, just to be different?" I asked.

Cork refilled his bowl and said, "You'll have to forgive Oaks, Squire. He is a businessman, not a navigator."

"Nor am I, Captain, but mariners tell me it is worth the investment. Perhaps if you will explain it to Oaks, it will further clarify my own mind."

"Surely. Well, Oaks, you have certainly been at sea at night. It is something like waking up in a pitch-black room."

"I leave that to the helmsman," I said.

"And whom does he leave it to? Like an awakened man in a dark room, he can bump into things, not having a bearing on a fixed point. However, when our man at sea bumps into something, it is not a chair or a footstool, producing but a stubbed toe. No,

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my friend, his obstacle can be a reef or shoal, which can tear the bottom from his craft and send her under."

"What about stars?"

"Helpful in deep water, but when near a landfall, you require well defined objects ashore. Most charts are not well defined. The sextant is only valuable in skilled hands, and then, of course, there are starless nights. But we are digressing into science. The Squire had put up two lights to tell all at sea who might be off course that the two lights are Point Judith and nowhere else, and I compliment him on his public spirit."

"Oh, that I could accept it, Captain," said the Squire, with a moan. "But I cannot. The Pharos was built to protect my own good name, as well as the men at sea."

"Go on, man," the Captain said, squinting his eyes in interest.

"You might have read of the shipwrecks off these shores over the past year."

"Yes," I said, "the *Boston Weekly Gazette* mentioned them."

"But what they didn't mention was the ugly rumour that spread in these parts and which implied that I had somehow contrived to cause these wrecks for salvage rights."

"Did you salvage them?"

"Yes, Captain, the first one. But after the rumours I stopped. God help me, my eldest son is at this moment apprenticed to the master of a coaster. Would I be so callous?"

"Indeed not. But tell me, why do you carry the financial load alone? Other townships have raised Pharos with lotteries. Why not here?"

"The townspeople, like those everywhere, resent the wealthy, and feel they can't afford it. Those lottery-built lighthouses are near ports where a lighthouse tax is collectable. Such is not the case here. I bear the load, but alas, not out of public spirit."

"Tell me, Squire," Cork asked, "is there any suspicion that the wrecks might have been caused by foul play?"

"It's a perplexing question. The shoals off our shore are treacherous, and the sandbars seem to have shifted, so accident is highly possible. I have personally surveyed the surrounding waters at low tide, and I had a young fellow from Yale draw up some charts. When word got out that I was going to erect a lighthouse, a single one, all hell broke loose from here to Narragansett."

"But why?" I asked. "You would be protecting shipping by

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warning them away from underwater hazards."

"And away from Narragansett Bay, or so the dockmen up there claim. As Cork said, night navigation is tricky at best, and if my lone light was a beacon of danger, there was fear that a ship's master would steer a northerly parallel course to the light and end up in Buzzard's Bay, which would enrich New Bedford."

"That's nonsense," Cork growled, "and can be proved so."

"Captain, did you ever try to explain logic and reason to a group of more than three or four men? Especially on a technical subject?"

"Touché," Cork said, with a smile.

"Well, how do two lighthouses solve the problem?" I asked.

"The Yale student suggested it. Our charts show that a deep channel cuts through the shoals. If a means could be found to guide a ship through it at night, a master could safely change from a northerly course to a westerly line, go through the channel, and then swing northeast towards Narragansett."

"Aha." Cork slapped his knee and tossed his head back. "I should have seen it at once when I noticed that the two towers are not in parallel line. The second tower is set back, is it not?"

"Twenty-five feet."

"So you have not only a distinctive seamark, but a unique navigation aid. You present the sailor with a simple light-in-one sighting."

"That's precisely the term John Knox, the student, used."

Following this discussion was becoming as difficult as listening to Cork and Tunxis talk Injun. "Forgive me, gentlemen," I said, "but this is all beyond me."

"Shall I explain, Squire?"

"Pray do. I barely understand it myself."

"Probably because the academician likes to cloak his knowledge in long words. Actually, a light-in-one sighting is simple, but it is more easily demonstrated than explained. May I conduct an experiment for Oaks here so that he might understand?"

The Squire seemed delighted with the entertainment, and Cork set to it. "First, Oaks, you will go into that closet on the far wall. When you emerge, the room will be in darkness except for these two candles, which will be burning on the table to represent the two towers on the Point.

"Now, when you emerge from the closet, you will be facing north, and the floor area in front of you will be cleared of all fur-

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niture. This will represent the safety of deep water. Now, as you walk due north, keep your eye on the candles. At a certain point, you will see the two lights start to merge into one. It is no illusion, Oaks. The lights really aren't moving, *you* are. Now the trick is to get you to change to a westerly course. That would be to your left, and bring you forward without breaking your neck on the stools I will have scattered there to represent the shoals."

"Captain," I said suspiciously, "I don't mind barked shins, but a broken neck?"

"Have faith in the system, Oaks, as must the mariner. When the lights merge into one, you will turn to your left and proceed so through the aisle I will have made between the stools, to represent the deep channel. Now I have a question, Squire. Are the lanterns designed to emit light on a 180-degree radius?"

"Yes, that's the reason for the immense candles."

"To be sure. So when Oaks is safely through the aisle, he will again see two lights."

"Correct."

"Then you have nothing to fear, Oaks. Now into the closet while I scale the mathematics to fit our simplified situation in this room. Well, come, my boy, you will be just as safe as in your own bed."

On Cork's guarantee I left my dark closet and entered the room. The candles burned brightly on the table to my left, and I gingerly walked forward. I was amazed to see the candles appear to move, and when they merged into one, I turned left with some trepidation. To my surprise all went well, and when the candles were two again, I turned north again.

"Amazing," I said after the other tapers were lit and the furniture put back to rights.

"Well, you must appreciate that this was a crude example of how a light-in-one works," Cork said, taking some more usquebaugh. "This student, this Knox fellow, has obviously made precise calculations, to place the lights in their proper positions."

"He was at it for weeks, spending nights out in a skiff while my son Secundus and I lit fires from rude poles placed ashore at different angles and heights. Once we had the proper mathematics, we started construction. In the last three weeks of operation we personally have traversed the channel at least fifty times. Three ships' masters have also taken their crafts through successfully.

"Copies of the charts were sent to all the major ports to the

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south and the harbourmasters have written back that they have made the information known to north-bound ships."

"And what of fog or heavy rain?" I asked.

"I am sorry to say that the lights are useless in foul weather, but we have tried to overcome that weakness by firing a star rocket every hour on the hour. At least it will be some warning, and will keep the taint of malicious rumour from my good name. Being accused of placing false lights to lure ships upon the rocks is a heinous charge."

"And punishable by death under Admiralty Law," Cork added with a note of grimness. "But it seems your troubles are over. Is John Knox still with you? I should like to meet him."

"To be sure. He is manning Tower One, while Secundus is in Tower Two. We have decided to hire keepers, but not for a while."

I smiled to myself at the Squire's penchant for naming things by number. A less precise man would have called the first tower the forward tower, and the second the aft, or rear, tower. But what could you expect from a man who had named his seven sons Primus, Secundus, Tertius, and so on? He once told me that he originally had planned to use the names of the Apostles, but was forewarned by his wife that he was overreaching himself. The female Delaneys were being named for the nine Muses. The Squire is clearly a man of stern determination.

"So, my lads," he said, raising his mug, "I give you the Point Judith Pharos, long may it shine." As he said it, Delaney walked to a large bow window and threw back the drapes. "There are my beauties," he said and raised his glass anew.

Out in the distance, through a starless night, were the dark landsides of the towers, eerie halos of light radiating above their silhouettes as their fiery faces shone out to sea. As we watched the halos glistening, Cork explained that the halo was called a corona, and the rears of the lanterns were much like a view from the dark side of the moon. Then suddenly a toll of bells and the wail of handhorns sounded off in the distance.

"Why, it's like New Year's Eve," I said, jokingly. Cork touched my arm and cocked his head into the sounds. He turned and looked at the Squire, who was white with fear.

"Oh, God," Delaney said, lips trembling, "a shipwreck!"

The ensuing hours of that horror-filled night will never be erased from my memory. Out in the darkness lay a sinking ship,

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its timbers grinding chillingly like the broken spine of a wounded and thrashing beast. Small boats with survivors bobbled in the surf as citizens from the surrounding countryside rushed to aid them. It was near dawn when the last of the longboats dispatched from shore returned from a sweep of the wreck area.

As the longboat was hauled onto the beach, the last survivors tumbled out. One was a young sailor of no more than 20. His hand was bleeding, and one of the countrymen came forward to help him. As he lifted the lad to carry him, he cried out in anger, "It's Primus Delaney, it is. The old devil Squire is at it again!"

By noon the Squire and Primus had been placed under arrest and locked in the brig of a Royal Frigate in Narragansett harbour. The charges were barratry, collusion to shipwreck, and murder, since three hands were lost in the tragedy. The towers were closed by Royal Navy order, and the Delaney household was in chaos.

Before the two Delaneys were clapped in irons, however, Cork was able to piece together the gist of what had happened at sea.

The doomed ship was the *Queen of Tortuga*, out of New York, bound for Narragansett. Her master, who was injured but alive, was Captain Amos Whittleby. At the time of the wreck he had been below deck, having left Primus as the watch officer, and helmsman Fergus Kirk at the wheel.

According to Primus, he had been given charts of his father's new enterprise and was anxious to use the navigation aid. On sighting the two beacons, he sounded the ship's bell and ordered Kirk into the channel-crossing manoeuver.

"The lights were joining beautifully," he told us earlier that morning, while being fed hot broth by his mother. All the survivors had been taken to the Delaney home for care, but it was obvious that most of the crew were suspicious and angry. "I kept the lights in sight until they were one, and then told the helmsman to bring her into the west. All went well, and when the lights started to part again, I thought we were through the channel. In fact, I could see the fore and aft lights of a smaller craft still further west. I was about to order us back north, when the crunch of the bottom came, and—well, after that it was hell."

"And now, in broad daylight," Cork said at the time, "we can see that the wreck lies hundreds of feet from the entrance of the channel. So you were on a dead heading for the shoal all the time."

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"Yet I couldn't have mistaken the lights' merge, Captain Cork. Fergus Kirk can tell you the same thing."

But it seemed the helmsman couldn't.

"Aye, the boy may be telling truth," the Scotsman told us later. "I kept my eyes peeled to the compass, and could nae say what the lights done. This I do ken, sirs. No wee laddie should have say on the course of a bark under sail."

Cork interrogated the rest of the crew, but at the time of the wreck all were at meal or asleep in the fo'c'sle. A second hand on the night watch admitted to being asleep on the forward hatch. The others on the watch were lost in the disaster.

Captain Whittleby refused to answer any questions, and replaced cooperation with threats and castigation.

"You have one of two choices, Captain Cork," he snarled as his battered head was being bandaged by a crewman. "Either the light scheme is faulty, or the boy was derelict in his duty. In either case, one of the Delaneys will swing for it, and I want to be there to see the execution."

"We are assured the lights were operating properly, and the system has been tested time and again, Captain Whittleby," Cork had said with some annoyance. "But while we are speaking of dereliction, may I ask you why the youngest mate in your crew was given command of the ship in a difficult passage? Surely you should have been on deck, or at the least your first mate."

"The setting of watches is my own business, Captain Cork, and I resent the accusation of dereliction. Why wouldn't I trust young Delaney? He was in home waters and following his father's charts. And I'm sure, if you are a mariner, you well know the youngest eyes and ears in the crew are called on when needed in a rough crossing."

"Then you admit to a rough crossing."

"He admits to nothing, sir." The speaker was the local man who had helped young Primus from the boat. His name was Myles Swaith, and he was truly no friend of the Delaneys. "I have heard of your reputation, Captain Cork—how you are able to twist and contort things to fit your own ends. But not this time. Delaney has lorded it over this vicinity for years, but now he's for it, and there's no help for him."

"There really isn't, you know," I said to Cork when we left the room. "We ourselves are witness to the lighthouses working, and if Knox's calculations are correct, then it's error on Primus' part.

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But if the calculations are wrong, it's the Squire's neck."

"Yes," Cork said, stroking his barba in thought, "but when you have spent some time at sea, Oaks, you learn not to trust the surface of the waves. It's what's below that counts. Let's talk to Knox and Secundus."

The lighthouse keepers were in a bedroom on the second floor. John Knox was in his mid-twenties, with flaxen blond hair and an aquiline nose. Secundus Delaney needed no description once you had seen the Squire or any of his offspring. The same red hair and round pixie face. It was as if they had all come from the same mould, which, when you thought about it, was precisely the case.

Knox sat in a chair with his head in his hands. Secundus, a lad of 18, lay despondently on the bed.

"I can't believe it, Captain," Knox said after we had introduced ourselves. "I am positive of my calculations. We tested them over and over again. If anyone should be blamed, it should be me."

"That's not true," Secundus said, getting up and patting his friend's shoulder. "My father and I have also used the system, and we know it works. And several ships' masters have done the same."

"All it proves is that your brother made an error," Knox said. "So what does that solve?"

"Mr. Knox," Cork broke in, "self-pity is a poor companion in dire straits. The Squire tells me that copies of the charts were sent to harbourmasters of all major ports to the south. Did you draw those charts?"

"Why, yes, I did. Oh, I see what you mean. I must have made an error on one of them, and somehow it got to New York and on to the *Queen of Tortuga*. Then I *am* to blame!"

"Possibly. But there is another aspect. The New York chart could have been changed. How were they sent?"

"By coaster, sir," Secundus explained, "out of 'Gansett. It was the quickest way."

"And Primus' copy of the chart went down with the *Queen of Tortuga*. How fortunate." Cork smiled.

"Fortunate?" Knox looked perplexed.

"Fortunate for Primus' neck. I believe there will be a trial, and I plan to defend him. I have that right, as a ship's master and owner. Now we have a point of doubt in our favour. If the Court will accept the argument that the chart could have been changed—ever so slightly, for a jot on a chart is hundreds of yards

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at sea—then we introduce the possibility of collusion from a third party."

Knox's face took on brightness for the first time. "Why, I never thought of that. But wait, Captain, the harbourmaster at New York—wouldn't he know?"

"I doubt that he would remember. Most seamen do not memorize charts they will never use."

Secundus smacked his hands together and let out a howl of glee. "Captain, sir, you're a marvel," he cried.

There was a commotion downstairs, and we all went down to find Primus and his father chained together and guarded by six towering Royal Marines. An English Captain named Cricker read formal charges and led the men away over the shrieks and wails of the Delaney women.

The rest of the day was spent within the legal machinery in preparation for a naval inquiry. Once in the town of Narragansett, we called on a local lawyer of some reputation. Giles Pomfret was an old eagle, trained in the Inns of Court, and regarded as a sound scholar. His offices were on the second floor of the Blue Whale, and after an explanation of the situation he sat back slowly touching the fingers of one hand to the other.

"I bow to you, Captain, in marine law, but this doubt-casting element about a chart being mysteriously changed—well, it is a thin line, sir. A very thin line, indeed, since the chart itself is fathoms down."

"That is only my first line, Mr. Pomfret, and I think you will agree that a good defense is the sum of many ramparts."

The old man nodded and then smiled. "To show you how ill equipped I am for the case, when you first said 'barratry,' my mind immediately went to the civil-law interpretation—the habitual maintenance of lawsuits or quarrels. Now in marine law, it means to sink a ship, does it not?"

"Technically, it is the use of fraud or gross or criminal negligence on the part of the master or mariners of a ship to the owner's prejudice."

"Yes. Yes, of course. And the Delaney boy being on the deck watch is the mariner in this case. But what of the charge of wrecking and murder?"

"The changed-chart theory, if proved, will obliterate all charges."

"Well, Captain"—Pomfret shook his head—"I wish you good fortune, but I'll also pray for the Delaneys at the same time. I will,

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however, prepare the necessary papers to allow you to represent them at the inquiry. If, however, this goes to a full Court, I suggest that you hire the finest marine lawyer money can buy."

We bid him goodbye on that sour note, and, when we were on the street, Cork walked in silence.

Finally he stopped for a moment and said, more to himself than to me, "Strange, a lawyer in a busy port, and he knows nothing of marine law."

"It could be his age. He seems in his dotage."

"That may be," he said, and then stopped a young boy. "Hey, my lad, who is the harbourmaster in these waters?"

"That be old Peg and Patch, sir," the boy replied with a shudder.

"Old Peg and Patch, hey? And I suppose you address him so when you bid him good day?"

The lad lowered his head and then shot it up again. "When I sees him I brings myself about, sir. Beware churned waters, my old may says," he told us through a toothless grin.

"A fearsome fellow, then?"

"Like the devil himself, sir. Some says he was a pirate and lived with wild natives on a far-off isle where he was a cannyball."

"And where would his headquarters be, lad?"

"At the foot of Tillford's dock, sir, but you won't find 'im there. Best look in Sadie's, by the Front Street." Then he said, wide-eyed, "If ye have the heart, for you 'pear to be of quality."

"Mere clothes, my lad," Cork said, tossing a coin to him.

One of the outstanding aspects of New England life is the righteous piety of the population. Yet, in its port towns, there is usually one low place where evil flourishes and slakes the appetites of men home from long voyages. Sadie's was buried deep in the cellar of an old warehouse. Through the thick and acrid smoke I could see a stairway that led to the upper part of the building, and dared not think of the evil doings that must occur up there. A crone with tousled hair paid court to our obvious means, and directed us to the harbourmaster at a table in a far corner.

From the boy's description I expected to see a demonic sot, racked with depravity. However, Captain Robert Tinker (for that was his true name) was a well kept man of 60. The appellation of Peg and Patch sprang from the spotless patch over his left eye

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and the ivory stump that served as his left leg from the knee down. To my further surprise he was a reasonably well-spoken Englishman of some education.

After we had taken seats, he must have noticed my own amazement, or sensed it.

"From the look on your face, Mr. Oaks, I take it you have been talking to the townspeople. I am no ogre, sirs. The eye and the limb were lost to gunfire in the service of King and Country. I guess I am resented because I was granted my post by Royal Appointment. Let me assure you, it is no sinecure."

An unbelievably buxom wench came to the table, and Captain Tinker ordered a bottle of madeira. *His* madeira.

"I take it you are here on the Delaney business, gentlemen. What service can I do for you?"

"I am told," Cork began, "that copies of the Point Judith charts were put aboard coasters and taken to southern ports."

"Aye. Four in all. Put them aboard myself, explaining in each case the Pharos to the ship's master."

"Do you recall the ships?"

"Ah, let me see, the *Tarrymae* was one."

"Excuse me, Captain," Cork interrupted, "to simplify it, which ship was New York bound?"

"The *Ice-Cloud*, under Master Swaith."

"John Swaith?"

"Nay, his brother, Ishmael."

"Interesting. There were four wrecks in this area over the summer months, I gather."

"Aye. The Judith shoals were becoming a graveyard, until the Squire came along with this Pharos idea."

"Now I'm told that Delaney took salvage rights on the first bottom, but who took rights in the other wrecks?"

"The 'Gansett Corporation. After the rumours started when the *Bristol Girl* went down, Delaney wouldn't put an oar in the water. So John Swaith and a few local businessmen formed a group and took the jobs. Damned shame about young Delaney, though. Shouldn't put the deck under a youngster, I always say."

"Then you believe it to have been an accident?"

"What else, sir? I myself put the Pharos plan to the test and went through the channel like it was the Thames. Say now, don't go taking on this bilge that the Squire was a wrecker. He's as true as magnetic north."

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"To be sure. You will be called as a witness if there is a trial, and I trust you will hold that position."

"You have my bond, sir."

When Cork offered to pay for the madeira, which was excellent, Tinker refused. "First one's free, Captain," he said. "It's good for business. You see, I own this place."

That evening, on our return to the Delaney ranch, we took a meagre supper in our rooms. The hearty familial spirit that had been drawn from the home had left only bleakness in its aftertide.

"It appears that the name Swaith abounds in this affair," I said, over the cold turkey and corn bread.

"Yes, the brother could have changed the charts, but we are on slanderous grounds. I want something with more meat to it."

"Your second rampart?"

"And a third, if we can find one."

With this, there was a tap at the window, which at first I thought was rain. Getting up, Cork opened the casement to admit Tunxis. Despite the fact that we were on the second floor, the Indian's sudden appearance was not in the least jarring to me. To come to the second floor like a normal person he would have to enter under a roof, so it was natural that he would scale the trellis to converse with Cork. The climb up must have winded him slightly, or set his mind a-bubble, for he spoke in English. Thrusting a sack through the window, he said, "Here, like you say, lower beach."

"Good fellow, Chawcua, and who was with you?"

"White man named Clint."

"Good. Wait below."

When Cork had closed the window again, he returned to the table with the sack and sat down.

"What's in that thing?" I asked, sniffing the air. "A skunk?"

"No. My second line of defense, Oaks."

I reached across, opened the sack, and quickly closed it. "Animal droppings. Dung is your second rampart?"

"Evidence is often as repulsive as the crime, Oaks. Now I'm off for the third."

"Not without me," I said, getting to my feet.

"You're a stout fellow, my lad, but not this time."

"And why not? Am I some slip of a girl, some piece of frippery? I may not have the woodsy wiles of that redskin, but I'm man enough to a given task."

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There were few times in my long relationship with him that I experienced true camaraderie. He reached out, clapped my shoulder, looked at me with those cold blue eyes, and smiled. "I never doubted that, my friend. Come, we have some climbing of our own to do."

My moment of gallantry stuck in my throat as we approached the base of the forward tower on the Point. With the ground-level hatches of both structures sealed tight with Royal lead, Cork proposed to scale the side of the thirty-foot edifice fronting the sea.

"Not only is it dangerous, but pointless," I said, as Tunxis uncurled roping lines.

"Wrong on both counts, Oaks. The facing is of fine hammered sandstone with a wide bond, so, despite the mist, the footing is sure. As for examining the light room, it is crucial to the case. I will go first, Tunxis to follow. Once up, we will haul you up by rope."

"If you climb, I climb."

He looked at the Indian, and Tunxis nodded. A savage was giving his accord to my own valour. Perhaps, at last, I was accepted by him.

I will not embarrass myself by describing the toil and fear of the ascent. From one slippery stone to the next, never looking down into the blackness, I inched my way up into more blackness. Above me I heard the shatter of glass, as Cork broke one of the panes in the tower windows, and a sharp tug on the guy line around my waist alerted me that the end of the climb was near.

"Take care of the broken pane, Oaks," Cork whispered. "Reach above your head and you will find a rod running around the ceiling on the inside."

I swung into the window frame and got to my feet. Cork was examining the apparatus with a shielded candle. The now dark light was a wondrous machine. Twelve large candles were imbedded in a holding plate before a concave plate of polished brass. The candles, when lit, must have reflected a most powerful light out to sea.

"What are you doing, Captain?" I asked, as he tugged at the base of the holding plate.

"Solid as Gibraltar," he said. "Let's take the ladder below."

One by one we descended into a round room directly below the light chamber. It had been fitted out as living quarters for a per-

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manent keeper, when he was eventually hired. A chair and a writing table were at one side of the room. Tunxis lit the lamp with his candle while Cork rummaged around. He found nothing in the table drawer, and obviously nothing of interest in the few books on the shelf.

"Looks like a wild goose," I said, sitting on the chair, still winded from the climb and the excitement.

"Perhaps," Cork muttered as he pulled back a curtain hanging on ring hoops to expose a bed.

"Are lighthouse keepers allowed to sleep?"

"We all must, eventually, Oaks. With the coal-fired beacons along the English coast, there is little chance of the light going out, so the keepers sleep. I'm sure that when Delaney hires a regular keeper, he will keep a night watch."

"Keepers, you mean," I corrected him. An opportunity I rarely have.

He looked at me from the shadows cast by the lamp and gave me that smirk-a-mouth again. "You! A man of ledgers and coin! My word, Oaks, that is astounding. One man can handle both towers. Stationed in this forward tower, he could see if the rear tower was lit at all times. What's below there, Tunxis?"

The Indian's head poked up the ladderway hatch from the deck below.

"Supplies, candles."

"Well," I said, "what next? I hope we are not going to climb the other tower."

"No need. Come, lads, there is nothing more here." Cork snuffed the lamp.

When we arrived back at the house, Tunxis went wherever he goes, and we entered to find a note from Lawyer Pomfret. Cork did not read it in front of Madame Delaney, but waited till we were in our rooms. He then tore open the sealed envelope and read quickly.

"They move with great haste in this matter." He tossed the paper to me and I read it with a sinking heart. Disregarding all the niceties and legal terms, its essence was that a Naval Court of Inquiry would convene two days hence to take advantage of the fact that Admiral Fenley-Blore, of his Majesty's fleet, was in the area, and had agreed to preside over the panel.

"My, my, a flag officer, no less. Is that good or bad, Captain?"

He shrugged. "All bad pennies have an obverse. If we lose;

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there is little chance for appeal in London. A Fleet Admiral's stamp will settle it forever."

"And if we win, that also ends it forever. But two days is so short a time to prepare."

"For us, yes. I feel other forces have been planning for weeks. But no use wailing over it. We must set some things to our advantage. Fetch me Secundus, will you, while I pen a note."

A note indeed. It was a missive of polite flattery and obeisance to Admiral Fenley-Blore. Cork expressed concern over the meagre accommodations available in Narragansett to a naval hero of the Admiral's stature. He went on to describe the luxury of the Delaney home and extended its hospitality to further add to the Admiral's comfort, and suggested that the Court be convened in the main hall of the Delaney mansion in order that the Admiral's august presence have the proper dignified surroundings. The most amusing part was his signing it, "Your obedient servant." Cork has bowed to no man, and I am sure he has never been obedient.

Secundus was dressed for the night ride, and took the letter. "Mind, lad, for the Admiral's hands, and no other's. By the bye, before you go. Was anyone aware that your brother's ship was making for these waters?"

"Surely. It was posted in the harbourmaster's office. Not the exact day, but on or about, you know."

"Estimated date of return, yes. Well, off you go."

The Admiral arrived the next afternoon with two aides. Fenley-Blore was an English sailor of the old line. In the days of Queen Bess he would surely have been one of the Sea Dogs. A shortish man, he tended toward portliness in his twilight years. But the weight of girth and age had not slowed his step or his agile mind. Cork, the sly fox, fawned over him like a lass to a fiddler.

It wasn't until the next morning that I saw through the reason for Cork's uncommon actions. We were at breakfast, and Fenley-Blore was saying, "Wild turkey, you say? Now that should be good sport, hunting from horseback. But I'm afraid we will have to get on with this inquiry business. I enjoy these sojourns ashore, but I must get back to sea."

"I understand, Admiral," Cork soothed him, "but why not have the best of all possible worlds? We can hunt to-day and hold the inquiry to-night. You have the power to convene at any hour, so why not at your leisure?"

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"Well put. To-night it is. Feel a bit sheepish at trying a man in his own home, though."

"Command is not always easy, Admiral."

He had hooked him. The inquest was to be held that night.

Before I describe that evening of surprises, dejections, and finally, of an uncanny solution, I must explain that I have simplified the text to avoid all the technical terms that fog understanding for the layman. I myself kept copious notes, and it took Cork three days to explain them to me. The air in the main hall that night was thick with such phrases as "points to the larboard," "keel lines," "true and magnetic course," and "lines of divination," as well as an hour's worth of talks and arguments about sails and winds and cross-winds.

The main point is that a ship was wrecked due either to negligence or to a faulty system—or so the Court claimed.

Cork went immediately to work on the changed-chart theory. He carefully laid the groundwork by describing how the copies of the chart sent to New York *could* have been changed. He was about to strengthen his question of doubt when one of the Admiral's aides leaned over and whispered into his superior's ear.

"Excuse me, Captain Cork," Fenley-Blore said, "but this line that the chart used aboard the *Queen of Tortuga* by young Delaney being missing is not correct."

I looked up at Cork, who was standing at our table facing the Court. His face showed surprise, and a chart was handed down the line of nine officers on the panel to the Admiral.

"Captain Cork," the Admiral continued, picking up the chart, "this was found with the flotsam of the *Tortuga*. It bears the inscription: *Delaney, Point Judith Pharos*. Would you kindly verify that it is the same as the original chart?"

Cork called John Knox, who was sworn in. The student looked at the chart carefully and said, "I'm afraid it's accurate, Captain," causing a murmur from the small group of townsmen who sat at the back of the long room. It appeared that Cork's first line of defense was breached, and I could see no rampart to fall back upon.

The Captain now went into skirmish manoeuvers. He called the Delaneys, and Primus and his father both took an oath to their stories. He also put on the stand a Captain Jeggs, one of the mariners who had tested the system, and he too swore to Heaven that it was a genuine chart.

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Next came Fergus Kirk, who would swear to nothing except that he was Fergus Kirk. He stuck to his story that he had been watching the compass. As Kirk stepped down, a voice from the back of the room said, "If it pleases the Admiral and the panel, sir, may I be recognized?"

I turned to see Lawyer Pomfret walking slowly forward. The Admiral recognised Pomfret, who stood facing Cork.

"Gentlemen, I am Giles Pomfret, counsellor-at-law, representing the Virron Shipping concern of Maiden Lane, New York, owners of the *Queen of Tortuga*."

He shifted on his feet like a nervous bird, and faced the panel.

"We, of course, have an interest in this matter and its outcome, and it seems to me that the good Captain here has everyone in sight taking an oath. We can't believe both Delaneys and still have a logical explanation of the matter. Now I'm a local man and would like to see fairness tendered, but my clients demand justice."

"And, from justice, restitution?" Cork asked.

"Captain, you're a fine fellow and a superior host," the Admiral smiled, "but we will have to get more answers than we have so far."

Cork was about to resume, when Captain Jeggs motioned to him, and both men talked in low whispers for a few moments. "Admiral, I have no further need of Captain Jeggs. We have his testimony, and he has a tide to catch."

"Excused, and good weather, Captain," the Admiral said, tossing him a half salute.

"Now, gentlemen." Cork walked forward as a chair was brought up for Pomfret, who sat and crossed his spindly legs. "The crux of the matter is the Pharos system itself, and to fully understand it, the panel should see it in operation."

The Admiral pointed his finger at Cork: "Now see here, Captain, I have no intention of setting sail to watch lights."

"No need, Admiral. We can exhibit it right here, with your permission. It's very simple. All we will need is two candles and total darkness. I would use my friend Oaks to demonstrate, but that could be viewed as prejudice, so I will call on a man who has asked for justice, Lawyer Pomfret."

The lawyer gladly accepted, and the room was set up much as we had it when I played the part of the ship. One major exception was that Cork had the panel table moved forward. That put us all

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facing the wall along which Pomfret would walk in darkness.

"Now, to truly imitate the conditions of the night in question," Cork said, before the tapers were extinguished, "I have fashioned a shield for the back of the candle holders. In that way, only Mr. Pomfret will be able to tell us what he sees. Now remember, Pomfret, when the lights are one, make your turn, not before or after, for those chairs could give you a nasty knock."

The lawyer left the room, and we waited, adjusting our eyes to the darkness. Cork lit the candles, for we could all see the halos above the shields. "Come ahead," he shouted, and a door opened and I could hear Pomfret slowly shuffling across the room ahead. Four, five seconds, and then he said, "I'm turning now," and then the crash of old bones and heavy mahogany chairs followed instantly.

It would have been a comic sight to see the old man lying on the floor rubbing his painful leg, had it not sunk the Squire once and for all. But then it occurred to me that Pomfret had deliberately turned too soon, in order to create a negative impression. I went forward in the low-lighted room and informed Cork in a low tone.

"Excuse me, gentlemen," Cork said to the Court, while he helped the snarling man to his feet. "It has been suggested to me that our legal friend here may have resorted to deceit to prejudice the case."

"That's a lie," Pomfret shouted, dusting himself off.

"You are correct, sir. I believe you did turn when the lights became one. Just as young Delaney did."

"Then you have proved the case against the Squire," the Admiral said.

"I have proved *a* case, sir. Let us see who fits the mould."

He walked over to the window and drew back the drapes to the oh's and ah's of everyone. The Admiral came to his feet and hurried to the window. "What are those lights doing on?" he roared. The two towers had glowing halos above their tops. "They were ordered sealed, and by the gods, I'll hang any man who has broken them open."

"There are ways around seals, just as there are ways around systems, Admiral. Say, isn't that a ship out there? See the fore-and-aft running lights riding the waves?"

"You're right, Cork." The Admiral spoke with sudden anxiety.

An aide who had come to the Admiral's side muttered, "He'll

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have her on the beach in a moment."

The Admiral was now purple with rage. "Cork, I hold you responsible for the safety of that ship. It was lured into the cove by those blasted lights."

"I take the responsibility, sir. May I produce the master of that 'ship'?"

"How? By magic?"

"No, by voice." Cork opened the window and called, "Ahoy!"

It *seemed* like magic, for the ship turned its prow into the beach and headed straight for the window. Then, as it got closer, we could see the trick.

"It's a donkey!" the Admiral cried. "A beast with lanterns hung over its head and tail."

"And the movement of a donkey walking on the beach would give an observer at sea the illusion that he was looking at a distant ship riding the waves."

"That's an old wrecker's trick, a damnable one," Fenley-Blore swore. "But what has this demonstration to do with the Pharos being faulty?"

"If we will all take our seats again, I will explain," Cork replied.

When the room was back to order, Cork addressed us. He now knew he was in safe water, and he played like a dolphin.

"Actually, I am presenting the evidence for acquittal in reverse. You will recall that Primus felt he was on a safe course when the beacons were joined, because he saw the running lights of a ship ahead. That disturbed me, because the over-all plot was so well conceived, so wondrously scientific, that I couldn't believe such a shoddy element would be allowed to mar it. It was just too much sugar in the bun.

"The man out there with the animal is named Clint. On the morning after the wreck he and my Indian friend searched the beach area and found what my yeoman calls 'filthy evidence' that a beast of burden had traversed the ground. Now, Admiral, you are correct that this has nothing to do with the performance of the Pharos. I say it worked perfectly that night, and will continue to work perfectly."

"My shin seems to give that a sound argument," Pomfret put in.

"I am sorry about that, Mr. Pomfret. It was not done in malice, but perhaps with a touch—only a touch, mind you—of indignation at your performance in your office two days ago. I am sure you

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are skilled in marine law, and I do not like to be lied to. But leave it, sir. This conspiracy required a genius and a fool, and you are neither.

"Cork, get to the point," the Admiral admonished, irritably.

"I beg pardon. Would you be kind enough to walk the same course which was so painful to Mr. Pomfret? Oh, no, I will not have the lights out this time. Please, sir."

The Admiral got to his feet with a look of simmering anger and took a place at the far wall. Cork re-lit the candles and nodded for the old sailor to start. Fenley-Blore was a quarter of the way across when he stopped.

"What the devil are you doing, Cork? You're passing a screen over the forward candle."

"Yes, exactly as I did when Pomfret was our ship. Only in the lit room you can see the trick. Just as Primus Delaney could not see the trick out over the blackness of the sea. Seize him, Oaks."

John Knox was a slippery fellow, but I held him fast.

"You can't prove a thing, Cork," Knox said, "How could I hold a screen in front of the candles up there? It's too big for one man to do."

"When I said this conspiracy needed a genius and a fool, I should have added a dupe, but I didn't want to forewarn you, Mr. Knox. You have told us that you went to Yale College. Did you graduate?"

"No, I went only two years."

"That's strange. Yale is a fine school, but more regarded for its humanities and theology than for its science."

"My father was a master builder, and taught me his trade."

"Builder, yes. The construction of the towers is sound. But what of seamanship, navigation?"

"I've read books."

"Good sailors learn their trade before the mast, as soldiers learn their craft in battle." This last drew smiles from the entire panel.

"I suggest you are a dupe, Mr. Knox. To devise this plan would require years at sea, years of experience with difficult passages. And, I might add, an accurate mathematical ability.

"As for holding a screen in front of the lamp, I agree that it would be impossible for one man to do it alone, and if you blew out the candles, there would be no corona, or halo, to be seen from the back of the tower to gull us all into thinking that the light was in proper working order.

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"Also, if you were simply to hold up a screen in front of the light, no purpose would be served. A ship running on a parallel line would see it one second and not the next. The abruptness of the change would make a mere cabin boy suspicious. No, Knox, the screen would have to move slowly between the lights from left to right to give the illusion that the lights were joining, long before that would really happen."

"That would be some trick," Knox said contemptuously. "What would I use? I took nothing from the tower that night, and it has been sealed since."

"You had no need to take anything away. The tools are still there in all their innocence. One thing I noted about your tower when I broke in the other night is that it is efficient. Yet the only purpose of a rod that runs around the ceiling of the front wall seems to be to give intruders a handhold. Another inefficiency is a bed that gives the sleeper privacy, when a lone keeper needs no privacy. Thus we have your screen, or curtain, which could be attached to the rod in the light chamber and used to slowly eclipse the light source from the front, while still providing a halo at the back."

"That's fanciful conjecture, Cork."

"No, I think the two gentlemen entering the room will back it up. Did it work, Captain Jeggs?"

Jeggs and a naval officer came forward and told of sailing out off the Point while Tunxis worked the curtain in Tower One.

"You are the dupe, Knox, and you have the privilege of going to the hanging string alone if you choose. Shall I produce the fool and the genius, or would you care to throw yourself on the Admiral's mercy?"

Knox looked at Fenley-Blore and back at Cork. He was frightened now, like an animal in a trap.

"Swaith! Miles Swaith is the culprit!" he screamed. "When I came here to build only one tower, he offered me money to advise the Squire against it, because he had been wrecking the ships with that donkey trick and spreading rumours about the Delaneys. When the Squire insisted on going ahead, Miles Swaith brought me the Pharos scheme, plans, charts, and all. Believe me, Squire, I didn't know Primus was aboard that ship. When I saw the running lights through the spyglass, I didn't know it was the *Queen of Tortuga*."

Miles Swaith was on his feet frothing at the mouth. "He can't

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bring me into this, he can't! I deny everything he says, and it's his word against mine."

"And your donkey against whose, Swaith? When I sent Tunxis to scour the neighbourhood with Mr. Clint, he learned that you are the only one in the immediate vicinity who keeps such a beast. Oxen are used hereabouts, which, as any wrecker knows, are too slow and too even-footed to give the illusion of a cruising ship. Admiral, I give you Miles Swaith, the fool in the plot. If he had followed his master's plan, and trusted the light system alone, without using the donkey trick, we would have never uncovered the plot."

"By the Duke's guns!" The Admiral thumped the table. "When I first laid eyes on you I said, 'There is a remarkable fellow.' Now I double it, sir. You are a genius."

"I thank you, sir, but there is only one genius abounding, and we must pin him before we have the lot."

"If you can do that, my boy, I'll give you a man-of-war for a toy. I don't know when I've enjoyed myself more. Well, go on, go on." The Admiral was as gleeful as a small lad on Christmas morning.

"I have given profound thought to his identity. Swaith is discounted, for he is merely a rude and greedy bumpkin. Our student is too limited in skill. So who have we? Let me see. We need a master mariner, to be sure, and a scientist of some prowess. Forgive me, Admiral, if this description seems to fit you."

For a moment the old boy looked concerned, and then he broke into laughter. "Very remarkable fellow," he said to the aide at his side.

"But, combined with these laudable attributes, we need also a man with a smidgen of evil, with an attraction to the low life. The criminal mind operates that way. A cutpurse or a highwayman will risk his life for a bag of gold, and then squander it on wine and whores. Another forgiveness, Admiral, but when I asked your naval lieutenant to accompany Captain Jeggs on to-night's cruise, I also requested that he have your Captain of Marines arrest a suspect—the only one who qualifies as a master mariner and a scientist with a touch of evil. May I produce him?"

The commotion at the back of the room turned all our heads. There, between two Marines, was Captain Robert Tinker, the harbourmaster, old Peg and Patch, as the street urchin had so aptly named him. . .

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Well, nothing is more jubilant than an Irishman who has just escaped the noose, and since both Delaneys were free, it was merriment in double time at the ranch. Fiddlers were called, punchbowls filled, and great sides of meat were put to the spits. The celebration lasted until past dawn, when the Admiral and his party took their leave.

"Technically, he owes you a ship of the line," I said as we repaired to our rooms. "He made you that promise before witnesses."

What would we do with it, Oaks? Start a navy? You know, this idea of closing off the Pharos light with a screen is intriguing when properly done. If a clock mechanism could be devised to shield the beacon for a specific amount of time—say, seconds or minutes—ships could recognise the seamark by the freequency of the light flashes."

"Excellent idea, and possibly profitable. Put it to paper tomorrow."

"It *is* to-morrow, and I'm for sleep."

So, I fear, it is to be with all his to-morrows. Sleep. Drink. Carouse. And, of course, solve. I shall persevere in spite of him.

"Q"

DETECTIVERSE

TO TOP IT OFF

by MARK GRENIER

When colonial crime is advancing apace,
And a knave must be stopped quick and proper,
All the folks feel secure with the Cap on the case,
Because Cork makes an excellent stopper.

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a *NEW* short story by

DOROTHY SALISBURY DAVIS

Not EQMM's usual cup of tea. . .about subjects that have been receiving more and more exposure on TV and in magazines and newspapers. . .and about two unmarried career women, one definitely more emancipated than the other. Liberation is not without its perils. . .

OLD FRIENDS

by DOROTHY SALISBURY DAVIS

The two women had been friends since childhood, their mothers' friends before them. Both were in their late twenties; neither had married. Amy intended not to, although she was beginning to lose some of the vehemence with which she declared that purpose. Virginia was still saying she was waiting for the right man to come along. She admitted herself to be an old-fashioned girl. One of the sadnesses in her life was that the men she liked most were already married. It made her furious when Amy would say, "Happily?"

"I suppose you think I should have an affair," Virginia said.

"Yes, as a matter of fact, it would be good for you."

"How do you know?"

"Well, let me put it this way," Amy would say, and the same conversation had occurred in some form or other a number of times, "it would be better than a bad marriage just for the sake of being married."

"According to you," Virginia would say, "there are no good marriages."

"Not many, and I don't know of a single one that came with a guarantee."

One might have thought that it was Amy who had grown up in the broken home. Her parents had only recently celebrated their thirty-fifth wedding anniversary. Whereas Virginia's mother had divorced her third husband, each of whom had left her better off financially than had his pred-

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ecessor. She and Virginia were often taken for sisters. But so were Virginia and Amy. Or, to make Virginia's own distinction, she was always being taken for Amy's sister.

At one time they had worked for the same New York publishing house, Virginia as an assistant art director, Amy as an assistant to the senior editor. Amy's father, a retired executive of the firm, had arranged interviews for both girls after they finished college. The jobs, he insisted, they had got for themselves. Virginia stayed with hers. More than anything in the world, except possibly a husband who loved and respected her, she wanted her independence of her mother. Amy, to cap the interminable subject, once suggested that was why Virginia wanted a husband, to protect her from her mother.

"I am perfectly capable of protecting myself."

And that of course, Amy realized in time, was her friend's trouble. Nobody could do anything for her. She resented anyone's attempting it. Which made her yearning for a husband suspect: what Virginia really wanted, Amy decided, was a baby. This insight, as well as others just as profound if true, had slipped beyond Amy's conscious reckoning of her friend's character long before the weekend Amy reneged on the invitation to the country.

Sometimes months went by when they did not see each other. Amy, on inheriting an ancient cottage from an aunt, gave up her regular job for freelance writing, copy editing, and restoring the cottage. While not far from the city and not actually isolated, the cottage retained a rare privacy. It had settled deeper and deeper into the ground with the decades, and the mountain laurel that surrounded it was as snug as a shawl.

Knowing Virginia to be a Sunday painter, Amy thought of her whenever there was a change in nature. Such a change had come that week with the sudden November stripping of the leaves. The light took on a special quality and the long grass in the meadow quivered glossily golden in the sun and turned silver under the moon. She called Virginia on Thursday.

"Well, now, I would like to," Virginia said, mulling over the invitation aloud. "I half promised Allan — I don't know if I've told you about him, the architect? — I didn't actually commit myself. Thank you, Amy. I'd love to come."

Amy was on the point of say-

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ing she could bring Allan, the architect, and then it occurred to her that he might be an invention of Virginia's, part of that same old face-saving syndrome which, when they saw too much of one another, made their friendship dreary. She almost wished she had not called. However, they discussed the bus schedule and settled on a time for Virginia's arrival.

"If I miss that one, I'll take the next," Virginia said. There was always a little hitch to allow room for independence.

That very afternoon Amy received a call from Mike Trilling, one of the few men with whom she had ever been deeply in love. A newspaper correspondent, Mike had been sent overseas just when they had become very happy together. If he had asked it, she would have followed him, but he had not asked it, and she had been a long time getting over the separation. Except that she was not over it. She knew that the moment she heard his voice.

Her end of the conversation was filled with pauses.

Finally Mike said, "Are you still hung up on me?"

"What humility! Yes, damn you."

"You don't have to swear at me. I've got the same problem — once in love with Amy, here I am again. I'd come out for the weekend if you'd ask me."

"All right, you're invited."

"I'll rent a car and be there early tomorrow evening. We can have dinner at The Tavern. Is the food as good as it used to be?"

"I'll fix us something. It's not that good. You can bring the wine." She refrained from saying that he could take the bus, an hour's trip. There was no better way to put a man off than to try to save his money for him.

She postponed the decision on what to say to Virginia, and while she cleaned house she let her memory of the times she and Mike had been together run full flood. She washed her hair and dried it before the blaze in the fireplace. Mike loved to bury his face in her hair, to discover in it the faint fragrance of wood smoke; he loved to run his fingers through it on the pillow and to give it a not altogether gentle tug, pulling her face to his.

She could not tell Ginny that Mike was the reason she was asking her to postpone until the following weekend. It would be unkind. Anyone else might understand, but Ginny would understand even more than was intended: she would re-examine the whole of her life in terms of that rejection. Amy did not call her until morning.

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"Ginny, I've had the most tremendous idea for a story. I was up half the night thinking about it, afraid to lose it, or that it wouldn't be any good in the morning. But it's a good one and I want to dash it off fresh. Will you come next week instead? I know you understand . . ." She made herself stop. She was saying too much.

"Of course," Virginia said, and her voice had that dead air of self-abnegation. "I envy you."

"Bless you for understanding," Amy said. "The same time next weekend. I'll be watching for you."

Once off the phone she gave herself up to the pleasure of anticipation. Almost a year had passed since she and Mike were last together. She had had a couple of brief encounters since, but no one had taken his place. She had worked. She had done a lot more work with Mike away than when he was around. They had not corresponded. He had called her on New Year's Eve. Collect, because he was at a friend's house and the British would not accept his credit-card charge. She had not asked him about the friend. She did not propose to ask any questions now.

At first it seemed like old times, their sitting before the fire with martinis, Mike on the floor at her feet, his head resting on his arm where it lay across her knees. His hair had begun to thin on the very top of his head. She put her finger to the spot, a cold finger, for she had just put down her glass.

Mike got up and sat in the chair opposite hers, brushing back his hair, something almost tender in the way he stroked the spot.

"I'm wicked, aren't I?" she said, carrying off as best she could what she knew to have been a mistake.

"Tell me about that," he said, purposely obtuse.

"Naughty, I mean."

"Oh, nuts. With the British, every other word is 'naughty.' Aren't I the naughty one?" He mimicked someone's accent. "It's such a faggoty word."

"I guess it is," Amy said.

He fidgeted a moment, as though trying to get comfortable in the chair, then got up and gave one of the logs a kick. "It's not easy—getting reacquainted when so much has happened in between."

"Oh?" In spite of herself.

He looked around at her. "I've been working bloody hard. Five months in Cyprus."

"I know."

"Does nobody in America read history?"

"I suspect the trouble is that nobody listens to those who read history."

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"Did you follow my dispatches?"

"Every word, my darling."

Things went a little better. He looked at his glass. "I can't drink martinis like I used to. What kind of vermouth did you use?"

The phone rang and Amy, on her way to answer it, said, "Try putting in more gin."

It was Virginia, of all people. "I won't disturb you except for a minute."

"It's all right. I'm taking a break." She was afraid Mike might put on a record.

"I want to ask a favor of you, Amy. I got myself into a predicament. When Allan called a while ago, I decided I didn't want to talk to him, so I said I was on my way to spend the weekend with you. I don't think he'll call, but in case he does, would you tell him I've gone on a long walk or something like that?"

Amy drew a deep breath and tried to think of something to say that would not expose the extent of her exasperation. The most natural thing in the world would have been: Ginny, the reason I asked you not to come—

"I don't think he will call."

"Okay, Ginny. I'll tell him."

"Get his number and say I'll call him back."

"I'll tell him that," Amy said. It was all a fantasy, and in some way or other Virginia thought she was getting even. If there was an Allan and if these little exchanges did occur, she would then have to call Virginia back and tell her that Allan had telephoned her.

"Was that Virginia?" Mike said.

"Yes."

"Hasn't she hooked herself a man yet?"

"You damn smug—" Amy exploded, possibly because she was annoyed with both Virginia and him. But Virginia, being the more vulnerable and absent, got such loyal defense in the argument that ensued, she would have been stunned. Indeed, it might have changed her whole picture of herself.

Mike and Amy did reach a rapprochement. After all, it was his remembering Amy's complaints about her friend in the old days that had provoked his comment: she should blame herself, not him. After the second martini they were laughing and talking about old intimacies, and how they had used to put the third martini on ice for afterward. Such good memories and the kisses which, if they weren't the same, were better than most, sufficed to get them into the bedroom. There, alas, nothing went the same as it had used to.

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"Damn it," Mike kept saying, "this never happens to me."

"It's all right," Amy said over and over again, although well aware he had used the present tense.

Later, watching him stoop to see himself in her dressing-table mirror while he knotted his tie, she said, "Bed isn't everything."

"That's right."

"But it's a lot," she said and threw off the blankets.

By the time she finished in the bathroom, he had gone back to the living room where he stood before the fire and stared into it. A fresh log was catching on, the flames like little tongues darting up the sides. He had not brought the martini pitcher from the kitchen.

"You can't go home again," she said.

"I guess not." He could at least have said that it was fun trying. But what he said was, "Amy, let's not spoil a beautiful memory."

"Oh, boy. I don't believe you said it. Not Mike Trilling."

"All right. 'You can't go home again' wasn't exactly original either. We aren't going to make it, Amy, so why don't I just take off before we start bickering again? No recriminations, no goodbyes, no tears."

Her throat tight as a corked bottle, she went up the stairs and got his coat and overnight bag.

On the porch they did not even shake hands—a turn and a quickly averted glance lest their eyes get caught, and a little wave before he opened the car door. When he was gone, she remembered the wine. It was as well she had forgotten it. A "thank you" for anything would have humiliated them both.

Returning to the house she felt as sober as the moon and as lonely. There was a whispery sound to the fire, and her aunt's Seth Thomas floor clock ticked with the slow heavy rhythm of a tired heart. Most things break: the phrase from somewhere she could not remember kept running through her mind. The old clock rasped and struck once. Hard though it was to believe, the hour was only half-past eight.

She called Virginia.

Her friend took her time picking up the phone. "I wasn't going to answer. I thought it might be Allan. Did he call me there?"

"Not so far, dear. Ginny, you could make the nine-thirty bus and come on out. The story isn't ready yet. I always start too soon. I'm botching it terribly."

"Thank you, but I don't think I will, Amy. I want to stay home by myself now where I

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can think things out comfortably. I'm a mess, but since I know it, I ought to be able to do something about it."

"You sound awfully down. Do come and see me."

"Actually, I'm up. Have a nice weekend, Amy."

Have a nice weekend: that was the *coup de grace*. Amy went to the kitchen and got out the martini jug. She closed the refrigerator door on an eight-dollar steak. The cat, her paws tucked out of sight where she sat on the table, opened her eyes and then closed them again at once.

Amy returned to the living room by way of the dining-room door. As she entered, she discovered a man also coming into the room, he by the door to the vestibule. She had not locked up after Mike's departure.

"Hello. I did knock," he said, "but not very loudly. I thought I'd surprise you."

"You have, and now that I'm surprised, get the hell out of here before I call my husband."

"Funny. Ginny didn't tell me about him. In fact, she said you didn't want one."

"You're Allan."

He had stopped. They both had, in their tracks, on seeing one another. They now moved tentatively forward. He was handsome in an odd way: his quick smile and his eyes did not seem to go together. The eyes, she would have sworn, took in everything in the room while not seeming to look directly at anything, even at her when they came face to face.

"Yes, I'm Allan. So Ginny's told you about me? I'm surprised, though come to think of it, I shouldn't be. She's told me a lot about you, too. Where is she?"

Damn Ginny. "She's gone for a walk." She regretted at once having said that. Now it was reasonable for him to expect to wait for her return. "Don't you think, Mr.—" She stopped and waited.

"Just Allan," he said, which she did not like either, the familiarity of it. No. The anonymity: it was more like that.

"Mr. Allan, don't you think if Ginny wanted to see you, she would have arranged it?"

"It takes two to make an arrangement, Amy." His eyes, not really on hers anyway, slipped away to the glass where Mike had left it. Her glass was on the side table near which she stood, the martini pitcher in her hand. He might well have arrived in time to have seen Mike leave.

He then said, "Should I confess something to you, Miss Amy—I guess that's what you'd like me to call you, but it cer-

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tainly rings strange against the picture Ginny gave me of you—let me tell you the reason I crashed this party. I wanted to see the cottage, and I wasn't sure I'd ever get an invitation, leaving it to Ginny. It's pre-Revolutionary, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"Don't you need an architect?"

That disarmed her—he was a man with humor at least. "Will you have a drink?" She swirled the contents of the pitcher. "A martini?"

"Thank you."

"I'll get a glass."

A few steps took him to the table where Mike's glass sat. "If this was Ginny's glass, I don't mind using it."

No more lies. She hardly knew now which were hers and which were Ginny's. "It wasn't Ginny's glass," she said.

He brought it to her anyway. "Whosever it was, it won't poison me."

All the same, those eyes that just missed hers saw everything that passed through her mind. She wanted to escape them, however briefly, in the time it would take to get a glass from the other room. "That's ridiculous," she said. "Sit down, Allan. That chair is better for your long legs than this one."

His movements were such that she thought him about to take the far chair as she had suggested, but she had no more than stepped into the dining room than he was behind her.

"What a marvelous old room!"

Of all six rooms this was the plainest, with nothing to recommend it except the view of the garden and that was not available at night. One end of it had been chopped off in the nineteen-twenties to provide space for a bathroom. She took a glass from the cupboard.

"May I see the kitchen?" he asked, throwing her a quick, persuasive smile.

"Why not?" This time she stepped aside and let him go on by himself. The kitchen was straight ahead, not to be missed. He had an athlete's build as well as one's lightness of step, she observed as he passed her.

"Puss, puss, puss," he said, seeing the cat. She came wide-awake, stood up, and preened herself for him.

Amy kept trying to tell herself that it was she who was behaving oddly, letting her imagination run wild. She tried to think what he and Ginny would be like together. They were similar in a way she could not put her finger on. Then she had it: Ginny never seemed quite able to hit the nail on the head. God knows, he was direct

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enough, but his eyes slipped past what he was presumably looking at.

Well, he had made it to the kitchen and if there was something there he wanted—a knife or a hammer—there was no preventing his getting it. She turned into the vestibule, that entrance to it opposite the bathroom, with the purpose of making sure the shotgun was in its place alongside the porch door, more or less concealed by her old Burberry coat and the umbrella stand. She could not see it where she stood, but that did not mean it was not there. For just an instant she thought of making a dash to the front door.

"Amy?"

They very nearly collided, his coming in as she turned back.

"Is the kitchen fireplace a replica of the old one?"

"Probably."

"Afterwards I'll show you where I think the old one was." He caught her hand as though he were an old friend and led her back to the living room. When she tried to remove her hand he gave it a little squeeze before letting go.

She poured the drinks shakily. "I should have got more ice."

"Are you afraid of me?"

"Certainly not," she said.

"I'm harmless enough. You'd have to know that for a fact from Ginny's having anything to do with me."

She laughed, thinking how obviously so that was. If she knew Ginny. Sometimes she felt that she knew Ginny so well she could not possibly know her at all. Maybe there were two Ginnies. "Cheers."

The drink was strong enough, but it was going tepid.

"Would you allow me to get more ice and give these another stir?" he asked.

"I would allow it." She poked up the embers under the half-burned log. The sparks exploded and vanished. Ginny ought to have come even if she didn't believe the story about the story. It was funny how sure she had been that Allan was imaginary. Nor could she remember anything Ginny had ever told her about him. Had she told her anything? Or had Amy simply turned it off, doubting that there was a real live Allan?

He returned with the pitcher and the glasses, having taken them also to the kitchen. They now were white with frost. He poured the drinks, touched her glass with his, and said, "What else would you allow?"

Harmless? She said, trying to strike a pose of propriety without overdoing it: "I'd allow as how—I wouldn't allow much."

He shrugged. "No offense."

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"None taken."

He started to shuffle across to the chair she had appointed his, then turned back. "What's much?" Having again amused her, he bent down and kissed her as she was reasonably sure he had never kissed Ginny. "Perfectly harmless," he said and trotted over to the chair while neatly balancing the glass so that he did not spill a drop. "Does she often take long walks at this time of night?"

"As a matter of fact she does."

"And if I'm not mistaken, we're at the full moon." He helped make the lie more credible. Knowingly? "Has Ginny talked about me?"

"Well now," Amy said, avoiding a direct answer, "I almost suggested that she bring you out for the weekend."

"How intuitive of me then to be here."

"I suppose Ginny has given you a complete dossier on me?"

"We do talk a lot," he said in a sly, wistful, almost hopeless way that again amused her. "Have you anything to suggest I do about it?"

She knew exactly what he meant. "A marriage proposal?"

"That's a bit drastic."

"It sounds archaic when you set it off and listen to it by itself—a marriage proposal."

"Or the title to a poem by Amy Lowell," he said. "You weren't by any chance named after her?"

"Good God, no."

"She did like a good cigar, didn't she?" he said, deadpan.

Amy sipped her drink and gave a fleeting thought to Mike, to the steak in the refrigerator, to the Haut Brion '61. And to the rumpled bed in the room back of the fireplace.

He put his glass on the table and got up with a sudden show of exuberance. "Shall I bring in more wood? I saw the pile of it outside."

"Not yet." Amy put the one log left in the basket onto the fire. While she swept in the bits of bark and ash, he came and stood beside her, bent, studying the fire, but stealing glimpses of her face. He touched his fingers lightly to a wisp of hair that had escaped one of the braids she wore in a circle round her head. "Your hair must be very long and beautiful."

"I've been told so."

"Ginny said it was."

"I wasn't thinking of Ginny."

"I wasn't either. Except in the way you hang onto somebody in the dark."

When they had both straightened up, he waited for her to face him, and then he lifted her chin, touching it only with the backs of his fingers as

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though to take hold of it might seem too bold. He kissed her. It was a long kiss which, nonetheless, didn't seem to be going anywhere until she herself thrust meaning into it. She had not intended to, but then the situation was not one open to precise calculations. He tasted of licorice as well as gin.

He drew back and looked at her. At that proximity his eyes did not seem to have the disconcerting vagary. He was, despite these little overtures, agonizingly shy: the realization came in a flash. Someone had prescribed—possibly a psychiatrist—certain boldnesses by which he might overcome the affliction. *Miss* Amy: that was closer to his true self.

He said, averting his eyes once more, "Ginny said we'd like one another . . . even though you don't like men."

"What?"

"She thinks you don't care much for men."

"What kind of woman does she think I am then? The kind who gets paid?"

Color rushed to his face. He backed off and turned, starting back to his chair in that shuffling way—a clown's way, really, the "don't look at me but at what I'm doing" routine which reinforced her belief in his shyness.

"I don't want another drink," she said, "but if you do, help yourself. I say what's on my mind, Allan. People who know me get used to it. By the sound of things, Ginny speaks hers too on occasion. I'd never got that picture of her."

"I shouldn't have blabbed that."

"No, you shouldn't." She started from the room, thinking: God save me from middle-aged adolescents.

"Where are you going?"

"To the bathroom for now. Then I'll decide where else."

She had not reached the door when he caught her from behind and lifted her from her feet, holding her close against him, her arms pinned to her sides. He kissed the back of her neck and then with his teeth he removed, one by one, her plastic hairpins and let them drop to the floor. "Please don't be so fierce," he said, his mouth at her ear. She felt the dart of his tongue there, but so tentative, as though he were following a book of instructions.

"Put me down. Your belt buckle's hurting me."

Her feet on the floor, she faced him. "I don't have to be fierce at all," she said and loosened the braids, after which she shook out that abundance of rich brown hair.

He ran his tongue round his lips. "It's just too bad that Gin-

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ny's going to be walking in."

"She's not."

"She's not?" he repeated. Something changed in his face, which was certainly natural with that bit of news. "I don't believe you," he said, the smile coming and going.

She motioned to him with one finger as much as to say, wait, and going to the phone, she dialed Virginia's number. With each ring Amy felt less sure of herself, less sure of Ginny. Then, after the fourth ring, came the gentle slow-voiced, "Hello."

Amy held the phone out toward Allan. He simply stared, his head slightly to the side. It could not have been more than a second, but it did seem longer before Ginny repeated more clearly, "Hello?"

He was about to take the phone. Amy broke the connection, pressing her finger on the signal; then returning the phone to its cradle.

"I don't get it," he said.

"It was a change of plan. That's all."

"And not anything to do with me?"

"My dear man, I wasn't even sure you were real."

"Maybe I'm not," he said, and smiled tentatively. It seemed flirtatious.

Amy threw her head back. "There's one way to find out."

He gave a funny little shudder, as though a chill had run through him. Or better, something interestingly erotic. He wet a finger and held it up as to the wind. Unerringly he then pointed to the closed door of the bedroom back of the fireplace. He motioned her to move on ahead of him. Had he looked in through, say, a part of the drapes at her and Mike? Or had Virginia told him that Amy slept downstairs? There did not seem to be much Ginny had not told him. With interpretations.

"Don't turn on the lights," he said.

Amy was not surprised. "We can always turn them off again."

"No." And then: "I'm able to see you in the dark."

A good trick. She said nothing. It was beginning to irritate her that Ginny had said she did not like men. Liking sex and liking men deserved a distinction, true. But she did not think it one Ginny was likely to make. And she had loved Mike. She had. Now it was over, ended. Nothing was beginning; nothing was about to be born. Except that you couldn't really tell. That was what was so marvelous about an encounter such as this: you couldn't really tell.

She bent down to remove her slippers. She felt his hand run-

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ning lightly over her bare shoulder, sweeping the hair before it. A jolting pain struck at the base of her skull. Then came nothingness.

She awoke to the sound of voices and with a headache worse than any she had ever suffered. A woman's voice said that she was coming to. Like hell, she wanted to say; not if she could help it, not with all this pain. There was other pain besides that of her head, and with the awareness of it she began to realize what had happened. She tried to put her hand between her thighs. Someone gently pulled it away.

"Amy?"

She opened her eyes to the familiar ceiling beam with its ancient knot, the eye of the house. She turned her head far enough to see Virginia's round and worried face. "What are you doing here?"

A woman in a white uniform hovered alongside Ginny. She was filling a hypodermic needle from a medicine bottle. When Ginny glanced up at her, she moved away.

"On the phone," Ginny said, "I couldn't hear anything except the clock, but I'd know its tick anywhere. Remember when we were kids: 'take a *bath,* take a bath, take a *bath,* take a bath . . .' I decided I'd better catch the next bus out."

Amy gave her hand a weak squeeze. At the door of the room were two uniformed policemen, one of whom she thought she remembered having once talked out of giving her a speeding ticket. "How did *they* get in on the act?"

"I called the ambulance," Ginny said, and leaning close, she murmured, "You were"—she couldn't bring herself to say the exact word—"molested."

"I guess," Amy said.

One of the policemen said, "When you're strong enough we need the full story, miss. Did you recognize the intruder?"

The intruder. In a way he was, of course. She took a long time in answering. "Is there any way I can be sure he'll get psychiatric attention?"

The cops exchanged glances. "The first thing is to identify him so we can bring him in."

"And then I have to swear out a complaint against him?"

"If you don't, ma'am, some other woman may not get the chance to do it."

"To some extent it was my own fault," she said, not much above a whisper.

The cop made a noise of assent. Neither he nor his partner seemed surprised. "All the same, we better get him in and let the shrinks decide what happens to him. Okay?"

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She thought of telling them of the point at which she had been knocked out and decided against it for the time being. "Okay," she said.

"Can you give us a description? Race, age, height, color of his eyes—"

"Ginny, I'm sorry. It was your friend Allan."

"Oh."

It was a little cry, scarcely more than a whimper.

"Would you give them his name and address? You won't have to do anything else."

"But, Amy, I can't. I mean, actually I've never seen Allan. He calls me and we just talk on the telephone."

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A POINT OF VIEW

by RICH RAINEY

The author was neatly killing me, unfolding my death step by step, leading me on with the hope that I would somehow make it through the story intact. This I could sense the instant I appeared in Fenwick's mansion.

It was simple to add it together. The mansion was spired and gabled, the rooms were solidly built of oak, and Fenwick's body lay on the floor of his immense library—and there I was.

A dusty manuscript lay on his desk along with some sketches of his beloved burgundy hills at dusklight, and Fenwick L. Peterson, of Peterson & Gabling Publishers, possessor of a young-forty body, was now completely at rest. Cause of death—it must have been me. I could see no other purpose for my presence.

I left the library and began to walk through the corridors, looking in countless rooms before I stumbled on the other characters.

"Come in, Beau," Harley laughed. "Join the rest of us. You

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can't do any worse, unless of course you—yes, it fits. You must be the one who did it. Tell us, what was your method?"

"Modus operandi," Timothy corrected.

"I gather I'm the chief suspect," I said. I crossed the drawing room, dropped onto the recliner, and lit a cigarette while studying them.

Timothy was an inch above me, Harley a paragraph behind. He was laughing his belligerent, indefinable laugh. Belligerent yet knowing. Obviously he was enjoying the part he was playing.

"Well." Harley put on his serious face. "Look at it this way. You and Fenwick have been on the outs lately. Correct?"

I found I couldn't deny it.

"And you were the only two in the house at the time of death—roughly five o'clock in the evening, according to the Inspector. So there you are."

I rose to my defense. Rather shabbily, I thought. Why couldn't I have proved that my whereabouts at the exact moment of death were in the arms of a budding young actress, while simultaneously proving that the villain was Tim, who sat silently now, watching or perhaps even ignoring our little conflict? All I said was, "Wait and see." I was sure I could have come up with a better line on my own, but the powers that be had different ideas.

We were all silent for a dense, confused minute. All momentum was lost. Then Timothy corrected the oversight. "It's a hard road, Beau," he said. I guessed he would speak every three lines or so, whenever our conversation lagged.

Apparently fond of laughing, Harley laughed again, a mindless quality joining his belligerence. He would laugh at my funeral if he had the chance. I was sure of it.

"The manuscript of course," Harley said. "It's all in the manuscript. That's the beginning, and judging from your condition, you're in it up to your neck."

My neck had to be there. It all fitted neatly. I could almost feel the gentle placing of the noose. Which way out? There were only three of us and so far I was the only one, in my opinion, who had any thoughts to speak of.

At this point I realized Harley and Tim were just two vague figures, hazy in their characterizations, and me. What of me?

I am six foot three inches. No, excuse me. Too often that is the case with suspects. Quite often we are rugged and lean. Here is the real story. I am five foot seven and one-half inches tall. My

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hair is straw-colored, almost hitting my shoulders, in keeping with the fashion. There is money in my pocket. To my surprise there is a lot of it. Occasionally—rarely, in fact—I'll come up with a witty line.

A maid entered the room. Harley did the talking, which I didn't hear at this point. I was on the preceding page.

She left and for a minute or so we had some blank thoughts. Uncomfortably so, since I could detect the writer of my story. He'd decided I was going to get mine. Definitely. From here on things would be no picnic. I realized I would speed to oblivion, all the while speaking horrible clichés.

She came back carrying a huge tray of London Broil. That and a mug of beer. I drank mine before I got it, and she had to go back for more.

Ah, his plan. I saw it now. How easy it would be to dispose of me. Of course it would start with the maid. She flitted in and out of the room whenever there was a pause and she always returned with more drink. The writer gave me a lot of pauses.

Another pitcher now, and more food. I could not help it, my strings were being pulled. I drank more and more. Drunk, I could offer no resistance. I made a pig of myself. Stalling for time, I tried to describe the maid. Her hair was brown, knotted in a bun at the back of her head. She was short, past thirty, plain-featured. It was no use. There wasn't much of her to describe.

The manuscript. I knew it was coming now. Any second I would head for it and then find out my end. Unless, wait! Barely introduced, and here I was going to my end, getting into the mystery of the manuscript. But the author was obligated to tie up all the loose ends. He had already mentioned an Inspector.

The Inspector now appeared in the doorway. "I'll be going," he said. "Can't solve this damn case. I think I'll go home and have a game of cribbage with the wife."

"Good day, Inspector." Harley laughed again. The moron.

Tim remembered he was here. "We'll be seeing you."

The Inspector started to walk away.

"Wait, Inspector!" I shouted.

"Yes?" He looked at me coldly, as if to say why had I bothered to stop him, can't you see what is going to happen?

"The manuscript. Have you read the manuscript?"

A scowl crossed his face. "No." He drifted away, presumably in the location of the dead man's room.

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I'd won a brief respite. Yet I had the feeling someone was smiling. Had I walked into a trap?

The maid came in with more beer. "Here you are, sir. Do enjoy it."

"Thank you," I said.

"It will probably kill you," she smiled.

"Thank you very much," I said.

Harley laughed again, sensing my loss of control as I lifted the frosted mug to my lips.

"Beau, why don't you take a look at the manuscript and check on the Inspector?" Harley said, between laughs.

Tim said, "Yeah," or, "Capital idea," or "Splendid."

I got up from the chair and crossed the room, but not before I banged my shin on the opal table which I had just noticed. After all, we were supposed to be in an elegant house.

I went into the foyer. At the end of the hallway I saw the door to Fenwick's study. It was almost closed, ajar a few inches. I could hear the Inspector inside saying, "Hmmm," and "Oh, Lord."

I headed down the hallway, feeling every inch of the long walk. Some pictures were hung on the two-toned wall—marble reaching halfway up from the floor, fir paneling the rest of the way to the ceiling. Knowing nothing about art, I decided to stop and admire the paintings just to forestall the inevitable end.

All I could say was, "It doesn't do anything for me," and walked on down the hall. I was almost at Fenwick's door. There was one more door to my right. Inside Fenwick's room I could hear the Inspector mumbling.

Any second now I would go into the room. Another delay came to mind.

"What of the love interest?" I cried.

My fiancée, Louise, appeared in that last door to the right. Oh, she looked beautiful. She was wearing her riding clothes. She paused, a startled look on her face, as if surprised to see me here.

"Louise! Thank God you're here. I need you."

"Beau, it's over. I never want to see you again. What I ever saw in you I'll never know."

"But—"

"Forget it. I can't stand you."

She sped past me down the hall.

I walked into Fenwick's room just as the Inspector was leaving. "Can't make any sense of it," he said. "Good day."

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Immediately my eyes focused on the desk. I knew my fate lay there, waiting. The dusty manuscript was there, its pages shifting in the breeze from the open picture window.

I went to the window and looked out at the meadow. It would be the last time as well as the first that I would see this view. It was gray outside, well into dusk. I saw the burgundy hills off to the right, the moon rising above them.

I saw the rest of the house, jutting in cross corners, laden with old fading gables and spires. A Gothic. I was trapped in a damned Gothic!

The leather chair whispered as I sat down and faced the manuscript. A cigar of Havana breed was in one hand, and a glass of port in the other, no doubt to further dim my wits. A slab of kif and a packet of incense were placed casually at the rear of the desk. Adding to the esoterica was a pack of Tarot cards wrapped in silk cloth, resting next to the manuscript. Seven Major Trumps were out of the pack, forming a halo above the manuscript.

To my right, on a Persian rug, lay the body of Fenwick. He was fashionable in death. Long-haired and bearded, dressed in a rich leather robe, his hands were folded in peace across his chest. He looked like the Four of Swords.

It was here that I saw my way out. Everything about this room was draped in occult gestures—the Tarots, the kif and incense, and even Fenwick's peculiar position of death. In short, the author had placed a means of combating him at my disposal.

Suppose, I thought, suppose I were to use these tools to actually tap some elemental powers who could change the story completely around. Suppose I could—I felt the author looking over my shoulder, watching my every move. Perhaps he too guessed he may be out of his league, flirting with these occult trappings. He still seemed to be in command of the story though, somehow knowing my every move even before I did. But, following the plot line, he had to let me stay in the room and read the manuscript. He couldn't very well lead the story down a false trail. After all, it had to be a logical progression.

I turned to the manuscript. Things could very well get out of hand here. Originally I suppose the author intended me to end up like Fenwick, dead after stumbling on some sordid secret in the manuscript that would end my life. But the author had gone too deep.

He should have let the Inspector haul me away in the begin-

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ning, but now, by embellishing the story with occult symbols, he had to follow through.

By surrounding the story with the occult he had created strange powers that I intended to put to use. By rights I was one of these forces, a creation holding certain unknown powers. In fact, I was very much the simulacrum.

I opened to the first page and started to read.

Sirens erupted in the background. He was going to use a *deus ex machina* to get rid of me! The police would appear before I could do anything. But Fenwick's estate had to be large, so the sirens were probably two miles away, rushing toward the entry gates.

I had to act fast, had to read the manuscript and get something out of it. The title page was gold-leafed in medieval script—*The Fool and the Magician*, by Aviliogne Chambrook. I turned to the next page. It read *The Fall of the Magician* by Avalon Chambrooke. Things were falling apart. Elementals were loose.

I read the next page. *The Falling Magician* by Avlon Chambrek. I gained speed, flipping through the other pages. They were all blank. Empty. Waiting to be filled. I saw my escape. The author had neglected to round out this story within the story.

I grabbed a ballpoint pen and wrote as fast as I could—anything that came to my mind . . .

As I reached the outskirts of London I came upon a lonely country road. There was a car, a Jaguar, parked just off the road, with its keys in the ignition. I hopped in, ignoring the cries of a figure that came bounding out of the woods, running toward the car. I started the Jag, shifted into gear, and rapidly became a blur down the road

Behind me I heard the mumblings and ravings of the author as he read my story, breathing hard and cursing the day I was born in his brain. He was so close to me I could feel his maniacal shuffling of the pages, so much like a howling wind.

I kept writing. I was outside London, hurtling past a not too detailed countryside. Not being much for descriptive scenery, the best I came up with was:

roadside lined with mangroves. Here and there a face poked out—a farmer with a scythe, a pretty young maiden bathing in a woodstream. So green was the hill country

The Jag was going faster than the speed of light. I saw nothing, conscious only of the tremendous wind that buffeted my face———

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the crazy demented pace of wildly flipping pages

I started writing short pieces about my youth, my young days in Fenwick's study, my recollections of Harley and Tim—anything that would fill the pages.

The sirens picked up volume. They were inside my manuscript now, somewhere behind the author. I don't know what the author was driving since I had left no other parked car waiting for him. But as a writer I imagined he came up with something, probably an invisible Ford.

Staying within the realms of the believable, I wrote a large herd of sheep into the manuscript. They were bleating somewhere off to the right of the road, heading my way. They were led by a hairy old man with huge arms and an extremely long pikestaff. I had the herd pick up speed, calculating the distance so they would block the road immediately after I passed them.

It worked. Behind I heard the screeching of tires, the howling of sirens. I never suspected they were so close. But now they had all stopped in their tracks. It was quite a large herd, gaining me at least a few pages.

I could tell I was coming near the end—the writing was getting easier and easier. Deep inside I knew the story was coming to a close. Almost casually I paused to consider some finer touches, some brooding atmosphere. Let's see . . .

I was stopped short. Sirens again! And the author would be with them. No time for embellishments. I crashed through the last pages, giving some meager accounts of my exploits as a lover, all imagination of course.

The last page was in sight. I turned it, raced to the end, to the very last line—something the author would have to deal with.

I parked the Jag after the last sentence and crashed off the page, scrambling across the leather-bound cover, and landed directly on my feet in Fenwick's study. I ended the manuscript quickly, ignoring the voices, the yells of "Wait, wait!" The manuscript was indignant, yelling and pleading. To no avail. I kept a firm grip on it as I carried it to the safe, which fortunately was open. One long scream of terror leaped from the bound pages as I locked the safe door. Later I would dispose of it properly.

Now I am brooding in Fenwick's study, gazing out of his window at shadowy burgundy hills. There is no one looking over my shoulder. The only weight on my mind is this huge feeling of living in one dimension. I must do something about it.

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As for Fenwick, he is no longer a problem. I am in full command of this story. Whatever I say goes. I'll resurrect him only if the need arises.

The phone rings. It is exceptionally loud, the droning bell hurting my ears. Perhaps I am not yet used to shifting dimensions so rapidly.

"Hello," I said.

"This is Lady Worthingale. I've decided to accept your invitation to dinner this evening."

"Delighted," I said. "Absolutely splendid."

"One thing though. Are you sure we'll be alone?"

"Yes, of course. Wouldn't have it any other way."

"Fine."

I detected a strange quality in her voice. Sensual, yes, but with a shrillness that ran deep beneath her soothing tones. A cruel calculating note that disturbs me. Then it all hit me. I know of no Lady Worthingale. Nor do I remember inviting anyone to dinner at my newly acquired estate.

As I pace across the study I feel a presence watching me. It is quick. Every time I think I've pinpointed the presence—this sense of something watching me—it moves, changes directions.

I hear a muffled laugh. It comes from all points of the estate—from outside my window, rolling across the hills, from the ceiling, from the closets. It mounts into horrible laughter.

I run from the study into the drawing room. No one is there. No trace of Harley, no sign of Tim. And there is a difference in the room. Small things. The shading of the oak table: it is much darker than I remember. And the picture on the wall: it is now a young man, unbearded, instead of an old man seated by a fire.

I ring for a maid; there is no answer. I sit in the recliner and light a cigarette, listening to the laughter. It is coming from the hallway, thick, ungodly laughter. It hits me quite strongly now.

My freedom, my flight through the manuscript, my temporary control of the story—it was all part of the plot.

The author was neatly killing me. He was driving me mad.

"Q"

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a *NEW* Mr. Strang story by

WILLIAM BRITTAIN

In which Mr. Leonard Strang, the gnome-like science teacher at Aldershot High School, investigates a jewelry-store robbery. True, there was only one possible suspect—but that suspect was one of Mr. Strang's pupils. Though the facts seemed to prove that no one else could have possibly committed the crime, Mr. Strang could not shake his conviction that the boy was innocent. . .

MR. STRANG PICKS UP THE PIECES

by WILLIAM BRITTAIN

It was Mr. Strang's free period. The little old science teacher was at the demonstration table in his classroom, preparing a chemistry experiment and wishing he could grow another pair of arms. If he held the Erlenmeyer flask in place on the ringstand with his left hand, he could insert the rubber stopper with his right. But that meant more than a yard of glass tubing would be projecting horizontally with no support whatever. Flexing his gnarled fingers, he glared at the laboratory equipment on the table before him. Then he tucked the tubing into his armpit, gripped the flask awkwardly, and giving a perfect imitation of a man wrestling with a transparent octopus, he brought it toward the dangling stopper.

At that point there was a knock on the classroom door.

"Oh, Mastigophora!" muttered the teacher, laying down the apparatus with a clatter. He walked stiffly to the door and opened it.

The muscular young giant who entered the room wore a conservative gray suit and gripped a briefcase in one hand.

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He extended his other hand and smiled. "Good morning, sir."

"How are you?" said the teacher, a bit less testily. "And who are you? I'm rather busy now—"

"They told me in the office that I could come right up. I thought you'd remember me."

"You know, now that you mention it, you do look familiar. But over the years I've had several thousand students in my classes here at Aldershot."

"Do you recall the time about ten years ago when somebody in your biology class dyed all the guinea pigs and hamsters bright green?"

"Of course I do. I could never prove it, but I always suspected a lad named—" As Mr. Strang's memory leaped back through his years at Aldershot High School, a grin spread across his face. "Kempel," he murmured. "Brewster Kempel. Welcome back, Bruiser."

Brewster Kempel, known throughout his high school years as "Bruiser," gripped Mr. Strang's arm with a huge paw that in earlier days had hurled footballs and paper wads with equally devastating accuracy. The diminutive teacher had often itched to tan young Kempel's britches. But Kempel's infectious grin and outgoing personality made it impossible not to like him.

"By the way, did you ever get the green dye off those animals?"

"I did. At the cost of a good deal of elbow grease. Can I assume this is a confession?"

"Yes, sir. But I'll have to remind you that the statute of limitations has run out on that one."

"Umm. I take it then that you followed through on your plan to become a lawyer."

"That's right. Passed my bar exams just a couple of months ago. Matter of fact, the law is why I'm here."

"Oh?" Leonard Strang's eyebrows shot up in the direction of his receding hairline. "Have I become involved in something illegal?"

"Not as far as I know," grinned Kempel. "But I could use a statement from you."

"What kind of statement?"

"Well, I'm with the county public-defender's office. Our job is to assist people who can't afford a lawyer. Right now I'm on a case that—well, it looks pretty open-and-shut. Of course, my client insists he's innocent. Anyway, I thought if I could get one or two people to testify to his good character, it might help him when his trial comes up."

"I'd be glad to help if I can," said the teacher. "Who's the client?"

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"Clifford Whitley."

"I see." Mr. Strang pursed his lips and stared at the floor. "So that's why he's been out of school the last couple of days. I've got to be honest, Bruiser. I don't know how well I'd serve as a character witness for him."

"Tell me something, Mr. Strang," said Kempel in a flat voice. "Are you shying away from this because Cliff's black?"

The teacher reacted as if he'd been slapped. His eyes flashed as he looked at the younger man, and when he spoke his voice was little more than a whisper.

"I think perhaps you'd better leave, Brewster," he said. "If you don't know me better than that last remark would indicate, I doubt that we have anything more to say to each other."

Kempel nervously shifted his weight from one foot to the other, like a small boy caught cheating on an exam. "Look, Mr. Strang, I'm sorry. I don't know of anybody who didn't get a square deal in your classes. But this is my first real case and I want to do as well as I can by Cliff. I just—well, spoke out of turn, I guess. But why won't you go to bat for him? He's a good student, isn't he?"

The teacher nodded. "His tests and homework are quite satisfactory. But he's also extremely militant. That's understandable, up to a point. But he can become violent at anything he considers an insult. The slightest remark can set him off, and when that happens there's no reasoning with him. Now if he's hurt somebody during one of those tantrums of his, he's got to take what's coming to him. What's right is right, regardless of skin color."

Kempel stared curiously at Mr. Strang. "Who said anything about Clifford hurting somebody?"

"If he needs a lawyer, I naturally assumed—"

A smile crossed the young man's face. "Clifford Whitley's charged with burglary, pure and simple. Smash-and-grab out of a store window. Nobody hurt, nobody even threatened. And Cliff didn't put up any resistance when he was arrested."

Kempel jammed his hands into his pockets and rocked back on his heels. "It's improper to jump to conclusions. You taught me that, Mr. Strang."

"A hit, Bruiser, a direct hit. I stand properly rebuked." Mr. Strang sat down at his desk. "Of course, under the circumstances, I'll do everything I can to help. But I find it hard to believe that Clifford is guilty. He might break a few heads over a chance remark, but I don't think he'd ever steal. He has too much pride for that."

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"Mr. Strang, you don't even know the facts of the case."

"And you, Bruiser, don't know Clifford Whitley the way *I* do. Now before we get to my statement, I want to hear just what did happen."

"But there isn't time—"

"Of course there's time. The next period doesn't start for fifteen minutes. Sit down there, please."

Mr. Strang pointed imperiously at a chair, and Kempel slumped into it with a sigh. From his briefcase he took a yellow legal pad and began thumbing through its pages.

"It happened Tuesday evening. About seven o'clock. Bainbridge's Jewelry Store, down in the village. Do you know where it is?"

"Of course," said the teacher. "It's in that section called Peacham Lane, the area they advertise as 'a little bit of olde London towne.' Pseudo-Nineteenth Century architecture, narrow cobblestone streets, and so forth."

"That's the place. The way Louis Bainbridge tells it, he and his clerk Jerome Osborn spent about an hour after he'd closed the store working on inventory. Finally Bainbridge told Osborn to go home. Maybe five minutes after he'd left, Bainbridge was in the back room when he heard a loud crash in the front of the store, and at the same time his burglar alarm began bonging away. He came out to see what was going on."

"And what was going on?" asked the teacher.

"The display window in the front of the store was smashed. And Clifford Whitley was running off down Peacham Lane toward Main Street."

"A couple of questions, if you don't mind," said Mr. Strang. "First of all, I've always understood that most jewelry stores have some kind of special glass in their display windows. Devilishly hard to break. What about that?"

"The place was originally set up to be a boutique," said Kempel. "When the guy who was supposed to move in broke his lease, Bainbridge took it over. He was always going to put in one of those special windows, but he never got around to it. So he settled for installing that metal tape around all the windows and wiring it into an alarm system. He thought it would be safe enough for a while."

"Umm. I see." Mr. Strang took out his briar pipe and blew into the stem. "Another thing. At seven o'clock it must have been quite dark in Peacham Lane, even considering the lighted shop windows. How can

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Bainbridge be so sure Clifford Whitley was the boy running away?"

"Easy," grinned Kempel. "It seems one of the local cops, a man named Joe Bell, drives his patrol car up Peacham Lane every evening at just about seven for a look around. He heard the burglar alarm and spotted Cliff right away. Bell didn't have any trouble catching him. Cliff practically ran right into the front end of the police car. Before he had time to turn and go the other way, Bell was all over him. Cliff insisted he was just out for a walk and got scared when the window broke, but—" The lawyer shrugged.

Mr. Strang sucked absently at the empty pipe. "And I assume there was something missing from the window display at Bainbridge's. Otherwise the most you'd have on Cliff is malicious mischief."

"Right. A couple of detectives were sent over and had Bainbridge sort through the stuff in the window. There were all kinds of things in there from men's watches to gold key-chains to who-knows-what. Plus a lot of broken glass. Bainbridge and the detectives went over the whole shebang. Finally it was discovered there were three engagement rings missing. Rather good stones in all of them. Worth close to four thousand bucks altogether."

"And the rings, of course, were found on Clifford."

"No," said Kempel. "He was clean when they searched him. And he insists that he doesn't know a thing about the rings. But Sergeant Roberts figures he must have tossed them away somewhere when he saw the police car."

"Wait a minute," interrupted the teacher. "That wouldn't be Paul Roberts, would it?"

"Yes, that's the one. He's the detective in charge of the case. Why, do you know him?"

"Yes, quite well, Bruiser. He should be able to help us cut a lot of red tape once we begin looking into this."

Kempel was puzzled. "Looking into what, Mr. Strang? All I want from you is to be a character witness for Cliff."

"Bruiser, from what you've told me so far, this case doesn't strike me as being open-and-shut. A window is broken and a scared boy runs away. Nothing criminal there."

"But, Mr. Strang, Cliff was the only one near the window when it was broken. It had to be him."

"Who says so?" asked Mr. Strang. "According to what you told me, Bainbridge was in the rear of his store when the window was broken."

"Two separate eyewitnesses,

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that's who says so," replied Kempel.

"Oh." The pipe between Mr. Strang's teeth drooped. "And who are these witnesses?"

Kempel flipped through the pages of the legal pad. "The first is Milton Gage, who owns a haberdashery right across the street from Bainbridge's. Gage was working on a window display of his own. When he heard the glass break he looked up from a jacket he was fitting on a dummy. There, on the other side of the street, was the smashed window and Clifford Whitley running away."

"And the other witness?"

"Jerome Osborn, Bainbridge's clerk. He must have seen almost the exact same thing Gage did. You see, he was standing right outside Gage's store, in front of Gage's window, reading his paper. Since he'd worked late, he'd phoned for a taxi and was waiting for it to pick him up."

"Let me get this straight," said the teacher. "Both men were on the street directly opposite the jewelry store. Is that right?"

"That's it. In a perfect position to see what happened."

"Yes, but if what you tell me is true, neither one of them actually saw Clifford break the window."

"Of course they did!" cried Kempel. "I just got finished telling you that—"

"You told me," said Mr. Strang in his most professorial manner, "that at the instant of the crash, Gage was involved in dressing a dummy in his own window and Osborn was reading his paper. Neither man saw the alleged crime itself. Just the aftermath—the broken window and Cliff running away."

"Mr. Strang, be reasonable," said Kempel. "Okay, technically you're correct. But the fact is, *there was nobody else* in Peacham Lane at that time. How could the window have been broken if Cliff didn't do it?"

"Have you considered the possibility of a projectile of some kind?" asked the teacher. "Fired or thrown from some vantage point?"

Before Kempel could reply, there was the sound of a bell in the hallway outside, followed by hundreds of shuffling feet. The period was over.

Mr. Strang got up and stuffed his pipe into his pocket.

"My chemistry class wouldn't be the best place to continue our discussion, Bruiser," he said. "Tell Sergeant Roberts we'll be calling on him tomorrow—about four."

By 4:10 the following after-

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noon, Detective Sergeant Paul Roberts had a few thousand well-chosen words he felt like using on Brewster Kempel and Mr. Strang; but with a reluctant bow to the squad's public relations, he limited himself to just one.

"No."

"But, Paul," said the teacher, "we just wanted a few moments to discuss—"

"No."

"If only you'd—" Kempel began.

"No." Roberts shook his head, annoyed. "Kempel, I thought we had a deal. You'd advise young Whitley to plead guilty and we'd go as easy on him as we could. Now you want me to help you get Whitley off. I'm not out to railroad anybody, but in this case the prosecution has all the marbles. You've got nothing at all on your side. So why make trouble?"

"I no longer think it's that clear-cut," said Kempel. "Mr. Strang and I talked on our way over here. And he was pretty convincing."

"Yeah, he usually is," grumbled Roberts. "Okay, Mr. Strang, we can put Clifford Whitley right next to that window the exact moment it was broken. Two eyewitnesses across the street saw him there. Now you mentioned to Kempel the possibility of some kind of an object being thrown at the glass from a distance. Out of the question, and you know it. A bullet would have made a single small hole in the glass. And any object big enough to smash the whole window would have been lying around somewhere.

"We went over the display case behind the window with a fine-tooth comb when Bainbridge was checking what was missing. But there was nothing. And don't give me any of this jazz about some kind of sonic beam, either. We considered that possibility—for about fifteen seconds. Setting up a rig like that would cost more than this whole caper was worth."

"Paul," said the teacher. "If the glass was broken from the inside—"

Roberts shook his head. "Except for a couple of small hunks on the sidewalk, all the glass fell *into* the display case. The window had to have been hit from outside. And Whitley was the only one who could have done it. The only one. Period."

"But there are still a few things that aren't explained, Paul," said Mr. Strang.

"Yeah? Like what?"

"Well, for example, why did Cliff pick up the engagement rings rather than a watch or a keychain or something more in keeping with a boy's interests?"

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"I dunno. Maybe he just took the first things he laid his hands on. Anyway, the rings were a lot more valuable than any of the other stuff."

"Another thing," Kempel cut in. "Cliff's a fairly sharp boy. Why try a stunt like this at the one time during the day when a police car could be expected to come by?"

"He didn't know about it, that's why," growled Roberts in annoyance. "Who do you know who checks patrol-car routes?"

"Perhaps," said the teacher. "Although if I were contemplating a crime, I'd take the trouble to find out about them."

"This wasn't planned ahead of time, Mr. Strang. Whitley saw a chance and took it. That's all."

"I see. But about those two men across the street—Gage and Osborn. They both heard the crash and immediately looked up. How long would that take? A fraction of a second?"

"I guess so," said Roberts, his patience beginning to wear thin.

"Then how could Clifford Whitley possibly have had time to reach into the window after he'd broken it and grab anything?"

There was a long moment of silence. Then Roberts slouched lower in his chair and pointed a finger at Kempel. "That last question—that's your case, is it?"

The lawyer nodded.

"Well, lemme tell you something. Time is relative. Maybe Gage and Osborn looked up right away and maybe they didn't. Maybe they were confused about where the sound came from and spent a couple of seconds looking up and down the street. I can't tell you that. But if that's the best you can come up with, take my advice and plead young Whitley guilty. It'll be easier on him."

Fifteen minutes later Brewster Kempel and Mr. Strang were riding back toward the teacher's roominghouse. "Sergeant Roberts is right, you know," said the lawyer glumly. "With what we've got right now, Cliff hasn't got a chance."

"That's why we're going to my place," said Mr. Strang. "You and I are going to spend the evening figuring out what really happened on Peacham Lane."

Mrs. Mackey, the teacher's landlady, seemed to sense the seriousness of the situation. Usually as garrulous as a stuck phonograph record, she served supper to the two men in Mr. Strang's room without a word.

By eight o'clock the floor of the tiny room was littered with scraps of paper, each covered

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with a diagram of Peacham Lane. Arrows and dotted lines were slashed across them, indicating the possible movements of Clifford Whitley, Bainbridge, Osborn, and Gage at the time of the burglary.

By 8:30 both men had to admit they were getting nowhere. Devices as varied as boomerangs, gigantic yo-yos, and trained monkeys had all been considered and discarded. The broken window and the theft of the jewelry remained a mystery.

Unless, of course, Clifford Whitley was indeed guilty. Reluctantly Mr. Strang admitted to himself that it seemed the only logical answer.

At nine o'clock there was a soft knock at the door of the room. "It's me, Mr. Strang," said Mrs. Mackey through the closed door, her voice like a breeze from off the Lakes of Killarney. "I thought ye might like some coffee."

Mr. Strang took the tray and thanked his landlady. Closing the door with a hip, he offered one cup to Kempel. "There's sugar and cream if you want it," said the teacher. Kempel took a large spoonful of sugar from the bowl as Mr. Strang went back to his small desk.

"Any new theories?" asked Mr. Strang, sipping from his cup. "Because if not, I'd suggest we close down Kempel and Strang, Private Investigators, forthwith. I guess I had Clifford Whitley wrong. Much as I hate to admit it, he has to be guilty. It's the only answer possible."

"Pfoo!" cried a guttural voice behind him.

"I beg your pardon, Bruiser?"

"Ugh!" gasped the lawyer. "It's this coffee."

"Mine tastes all right," said Mr. Strang.

"That's because you take it black. Mine's full of—of salt."

"Why, it can't—" The teacher stopped, then nodded knowingly. "Yes, it can, too. Mrs. Mackey keeps her cans of salt and sugar next to each other on the bottom shelf in the kitchen. Sometimes she's not too careful which can she picks up. Just last week she made a similar mistake and served a candied beef stew that had my taste buds begging for mercy. Wait here and I'll go down and get you some—"

His voice broke off suddenly. For a moment his mouth was just a small round opening between nose and chin. And then a grin spread across the old teacher's face.

"That's it, you know," he said to Kempel.

"What's it?" asked the lawyer, heading for the bathroom to rinse the salt from his mouth.

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"The way it was done. The broken window. Oh, what prime idiots we've both been! It wasn't that the thing was too complicated. On the contrary, it was too simple."

"What are you mumbling about, Mr. Strang?"

"About Clifford Whitley. I didn't think I could be that wrong about him. He didn't steal anything. He's taking the hobo's blame, or whatever you call it."

"A bum rap?" suggested Kempel.

"Yes, that's it."

"How do you figure?"

"No time now, Bruiser. Look, here's what I want you to do. Get in touch with Paul Roberts. Call him at home if he's not at the squad room." Mr. Strang began scribbling words on the back of one of the diagrams. "Give him this."

"And where'll you be, Mr. Strang?"

"Down on Peacham Lane. Where else?"

Peacham Lane was deserted when Mr. Strang got there. Three streetlamps, designed to look like old-fashioned gaslights, were all that illuminated its length. Fortunately one was directly across the street from the boarded-up window of the Bainbridge Jewelry Store.

Mr. Strang shivered, only partly because of the cold. The atmosphere of the place was effective, he had to admit that. He half expected Bill Sykes, Abel Magwich, or some other sinister Dickensian character to move out of the deep shadows.

He found what he was looking for at the curb directly in front of Bainbridge's. His gloved hands fumbled for several minutes, but finally he was ready to leave. As he got stiffly to his feet, he heard the grinding rumble of a distinctly modern garbage truck headed in his direction.

When he arrived at Paul Roberts' house, the detective and Kempel were waiting for him. "Can you cut this short, Mr. Strang?" asked the detective. "The news is coming on the tube, and I don't want to miss it."

"As short as you like, Paul," was the answer. "I just want to show you a couple of things and ask if they'll arrange a meeting of everyone involved in this case. Tomorrow after school, if that's possible."

"Sounds crazy, but I think I can arrange it if you've got something really important. What did you want to show me?"

"These." The teacher extended his hands toward the detective. . .

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The little interrogation room in the precinct house seemed jammed almost to overflowing by the time Mr. Strang got there. In one corner Brewster Kempel was murmuring something to Clifford Whitley and patting the shoulder of the scowling youngster reassuringly. Opposite them, Louis Bainbridge and Jerome Osborn were whispering excitedly, waving their arms in broad gestures. At the table in the center of the room Milton Gage was explaining to Paul Roberts the problems of having to close his store in the middle of the day.

As Mr. Strang entered, Roberts got to his feet. "Glad you got here," said the detective. "I didn't know how much longer I could hold 'em without somebody threatening to walk out. I hope you can make good on what you told me last night. I sent a couple of men out, but they haven't phoned in yet."

"Hey, Mr. Strang!" called out Clifford. "You the dude what's gonna spring me? Man, I sure hope so. This cat what they got for my lawyer sure ain't been much good so far."

"If you keep talking that way, I may just let them keep you here," replied the teacher. "Your street vernacular is like something from a bad movie."

"I'm sorry, man—uh—Mr. Strang."

"Well, I'm sorry you called this ridiculous meeting," snapped Bainbridge. "I've got a store to run. And it's going to be twice as hard attracting customers with my display window gone. Let's get on with this."

"Very well," said the teacher. Then, carefully, he removed his glasses and polished them on his necktie. That finished, he waved them about in his right hand, at the same time inserting his left into a jacket pocket.

"Problem," he began. "How does one break a window and remove some of the most expensive jewelry behind it in the twinkling of an eye without anyone observing the actual theft?"

"But we did see—" Gage began.

"No, sir, you did not. All parties involved heard a crash and then saw Clifford running off down the street. The actual theft of the jewels was never seen."

"So what?" said Osborn. "Did the diamond rings jump out of that broken window by themselves? This young man had to be the one who stole them. There's no other way anybody could have got at them."

"Oh, but that isn't quite true." Mr. Strang turned to Bainbridge. "Is it?" he asked.

"Well, I don't see how else—" Bainbridge began.

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"Oh, come now. All those watches and things didn't leap into place through the solid back wall of the display case. How do you arrange the display in your window, Mr. Bainbridge?"

"The back of the case opens up inside the store," was the reply. "That's how we get things in there."

"Exactly. And that's the way they were taken out, too."

"Hey, wait a minute." Bainbridge was on his feet, his face a fiery red. "I was inside the store, remember? And I'd have seen anybody who—"

"Of course you would. Assuming the jewelry had been stolen at the time the window was broken. But of course that wasn't the case. The rings, in fact, had been taken earlier that day. With the number of objects in that window a few missing items wouldn't be noticed, except on close examination."

"You know," said Bainbridge, "I don't like the way this conversation is going."

"Neither do I," chimed in Osborn. "Are you saying that Mr. Bainbridge stole his own stuff? For the insurance or something?"

"Of course not," said the teacher.

"Then what—"

"Mr. Bainbridge couldn't have taken it. Because you did, Mr. Osborn."

Osborn rushed to the table where Roberts was sitting and began shouting at the detective. Roberts took it for almost a minute. Finally he rose, towering over the smaller man, and grasped him by one arm. The detective half led, half carried him back to his chair.

"Let Mr. Strang have his say," murmured the detective softly. "Then, if he's wrong, we can all sit around and tell him he's got rocks in his head. Go on, Mr. Strang."

"Very well. Mr. Osborn here removed the rings during the day—very probably while you were out to lunch, Mr. Bainbridge. He just put them in his pocket, I'd imagine. However, he knew that eventually they'd be missed. So he'd developed a little plan to make the missing jewelry look like a simple burglary. All he had to do was break a window. Simple as that."

"Yeah, and that's where your half-baked theory falls apart," snapped Osborn, stabbing a finger in the teacher's direction. "When that window was broken I was standing on the other side of the street. I was right outside the window where Milt here was working. Couldn't have been more than a couple of feet from him."

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"That's true, Mr. Strang," said Gage. "Of course I was busy dressing the dummy, but I'm sure I'd have seen Jerry run across the street and back. When the window shattered, I looked up almost immediately."

"Oh, Mr. Osborn didn't run across the street," Mr. Strang replied calmly. "He remained right there in front of your store, Mr. Gage."

"Then how could I have broken the window?" Osborn demanded.

"It was easy. You threw something at it."

Osborn stalked over to the detective again. "I'm telling you, Roberts, this—this schoolteacher is the one who should be locked up. You were on the scene. You and Mr. Bainbridge examined the window. How could I have—"

"Mr. Gage," interrupted Mr. Strang, "just before you heard the glass break, Osborn was standing right outside your window. And he was doing what?"

"Why, reading his newspaper."

"A newspaper which had to have been bought earlier in the day," said the teacher, "because all the stores were closed on Peacham Lane by the time he got out of work."

"Yeah, yeah," said Osborn. "I got the paper at lunchtime. I always do that. So what?"

"But you also purchased something else on your lunch break, didn't you? Something you had wrapped up in that newspaper when you left the store. And then waited in front of Mr. Gage's haberdashery, knowing he'd furnish you with a perfect alibi.

"At last you spotted Clifford coming towards you on the opposite side of the street. The perfect person to complete your plan. Who'd believe him, no matter how often he denied any knowledge of what had happened? Finally he passed the window. And that's when you took the object from inside your newspaper and hurled it across Peacham Lane so that it crashed through the window of the jewelry store opposite you.

"Mr. Gage didn't see that quick movement of your arm because he was involved in his work. And the Lane is so narrow you could hardly have missed. Clifford was startled and ran away. That's when Officer Bell picked him up."

"Wait a minute, wait a minute," said Bainbridge. "Jerry's been working for me almost a year now. I'm not going to believe he took those rings unless you can do better than that, Mr. Strang. I mean, what *kind* of thing could he have thrown across the alley *that nobody could find?*"

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"I didn't figure it out until yesterday," replied the teacher. "It was when my landlady made a mistake and used salt for sugar. Those two look so much alike that—well, it's almost impossible by just looking at them to tell them apart."

"But what's that got to do with Jerry throwing something?"

Mr. Strang reached into a pocket and took out a small piece of paper. "I made a few phone calls during my lunch period today. One of them paid off. I have here a salesslip from the Aldershot Hardware Store. The clerk is ready to swear that Mr. Osborn made the purchase written on it."

"What purchase?" Bainbridge demanded.

"One pane of extra-thick glass twelve inches square."

"Glass? But—"

"Don't you see? Osborn kept the glass inside the newspaper. Then, at the proper moment, as Cliff passed the window, he scaled it across the narrow street in much the same manner that children fling those toys shaped like plastic discs. The glass struck the window and shattered it. At the same time the piece Osborn had purchased broke, either by hitting the window or by falling to the street. Just a few bits of extra glass that nobody would notice—something to pick up and put in the trash. Who'd go to the trouble of reconstructing a whole window, just to show there were some pieces of glass left over? Especially when there was a ready-made suspect."

"Y'know," said Bainbridge skeptically, "all this sounds very fine, Mr. Strang. But it's just a theory. No proof."

"There's proof, Mr. Bainbridge," said Roberts. "Last night Mr. Strang went back to Peacham Lane. He was lucky. You had a trash can full of broken glass set out on the curb, but the collection truck hadn't gone by yet. He found two pieces of glass. Two special pieces."

"Yeah? Why special?"

"Because one of 'em's only about two-thirds as thick as the other. It doesn't matter which is which. The fact is, there were *two kinds* of glass in that mess where your window was. But the window itself was just one solid piece. So the second kind of glass had to come from somewhere."

Before Bainbridge could put his next question, a uniformed officer came to the door of the interrogation room and motioned Roberts outside. As he left; Osborn turned to the teacher, a smirk on his face.

"Maybe you think you're going to hang this on me," he

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sneered. "But I bought that glass to fix one of my fish tanks. Yeah, I keep fish as a hobby. Anybody in my apartment building will tell you that. So where's your fancy theory now, Mr. Schoolteacher?"

Before Mr. Strang could reply, Roberts was at the door again. He looked at Kempel with a smile. "You and Cliff can go any time you want," he said. "But I think, Mr. Osborn, that you and I had better have a little talk."

"Me? Why?" asked Osborn.

"Because on the strength of the difference in those two pieces of glass that Mr. Strang found, I got a judge to issue a warrant to search your apartment. My men have been over there since shortly after you left the place. They found the stolen rings hidden in the gravel at the bottom of one of your fish tanks."

"Q"

DETECTIVERSE

MR. STRANG DOPES IT OUT

by MARK GRENIER

When detectives are baffled by pros
Pushing drugs in the school on the sly,
We can count on L. Strang to expose
The crooks who make Aldershot — High!

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THE JURY BOX

by JOHN DICKSON CARR

Due to the grotesquely inflated price of hardcover books, as there has been previous occasion to remark, it's always a pleasure when I can recommend four paperbacks. And once more the miracle occurs, properly proportioned for balance.

Beginning with a pair of sound detective novels, the first a classic from the Golden Age and the second comparatively recent, we find them supported by one last season's action thriller and one brand-new adventure of a favorite secret agent. Though chance supplied those proportions, design could have done no better.

Keeper of the Keys, by Earl Derr Biggers (Bantam, $1.25), is the last of the half-dozen Charlie Chan novels which Charlie's creator wrote before his untimely death in 1933. Though I missed this story on its first appearance, our Chinese sleuth from Hawaii, with his wise saws and his unruffled temper, can be welcomed soon or late.

The four ex-husbands of Ellen Landini, beautiful but unstable opera star, have assembled at Dudley Ward's luxurious home above Lake Tahoe. Ward, her first husband, seeks the lost son he thinks he has sired by Landini. Others, from husbands or servants to her latest *fiancé,* have different views. Amid a boiling of motives, suspects, and contradictory clues, Ellen Landini is shot to death near the study window.

If *Keeper of the Keys* cannot quite match *Charlie Chan Carries On* (also available from Bantam), it's an ingenious, fair-play mystery remarkable for expert storytelling in this inept age. Pit your wits against the redoubtable Charlie; I venture to bet you'll agree.

Emma Lathen's *Murder Against the Grain* (Pocket Books, $1.25), which I also missed on its original publication eight years ago, concerns a Russian grain deal imagined some time before our best businessmen were conned by this project in reality.

"America's Agatha Christie," who in writing good detection can also make finance almost intelligible to one with no head for it, again ensnares us into the affairs of the Sloan Guaranty Trust,

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where we investigate with Banker Detective John Putnam Thatcher.

Though sinister wings take flight with a huge theft of Soviet funds and with murder outside the Russian Embassy, the author's skill at satiric comedy makes this a drama of cross-purposes in which everybody misunderstands everybody else until Thatcher and one unexpected ally fit together the clues for its airport finale. If only a connoisseur will be likely to fasten guilt where guilt belongs, that's as it should be. Every Emma Lathen title belongs to the connoisseur; for him these books are written.

Cut off in storm-cum-avalanche shortly before Christmas, the mountain village of *Snowbound*, by Bill Pronzini (Fawcett, $1.50), is held hostage at gunpoint by three hoods from L.A.

Kubion, Brodie, and Loxner are on the lam; Kubion, leading them, has shot to kill when their grand-scale heist went sour; the charge, if law closes in, will be Murder One. It's Kubion's idea to rip off the whole valley, draining it of every penny. Though Brodie and Loxner are criminals, they are neither vicious nor psychotic. Kubion is both; if the others allowed it, he would slaughter everyone and leave no witnesses.

Thus begins the battle, with Kubion for hell's side; and, for the village, such likable souls as old Lew Coopersmith, young Johnny Tribucci, or the mysterious newcomer called Zachary Cain. The theme may not be new, but Mr. Pronzini holds us hypnotized until the Christmas Eve climax outside Happy Valley's beleaguered church. *Snowbound* is an action thriller very much for your list.

With Donald Hamilton's *The Terminators* (Fawcett, $1.25) we are swept along through the sixteenth mission in which Matt Helm, secret agent of some unnamed hush-hush bureau, acts as licensed assassin and charms yet another young lady as alluring as she is broad-minded.

At Bergen in Norway Matt meets the female agent with whom he must cruise by steamer up the Norwegian coast. He has no chance to charm this girl, who is murdered almost at once. Matt's quest then becomes a bitter undercover struggle for coastal oil rights. Assisted by an American Navy official, he meets (or collides with) such types as Teutonic Dr. Elfenbein and daughter, beautiful Diana Lawrence, and treacherous Paul Denison amid thunderous action before the unexpected end. Strong recommendation may be taken for granted; neither Matt Helm nor Donald Hamilton will ever let you down.

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a *NEW* crime story by

RICHARD LAYMON

"You don't catch me arguing with an armed woman"—not with an old gal packing one of those long-barreled .38's and hellbent on—well, she called it justice. . .

PAYING JOE BACK

by RICHARD LAYMON

Folks say everything changes, but that's not so. I've lived in Windville all my life, and Joe's Bar & Grill looks just the same to me as always.

It has the same heavy steel grill, the same counter, the same swivel stools. Those long tables sticking out of the walls aren't much different than they were 30 years back, when Joe opened up — just older and more beaten up. The booth cushions got new upholstery seven years back, but Joe had them fixed up in the same red vinyl stuff as before, so you can't hardly tell the difference.

Only one thing has changed about Joe's place. That's the people. Some of the old-timers keep dropping by, regular as clockwork. But time has changed them considerably. Lester Keyhoe, for instance, fell to pieces after his wife kicked over. And old Gimpy Sedge lost his conductor job, so he just watches the train pull in and leave without him, then comes by here to tie one on with Lester.

Joe's gone, too. Not *gone,* just retired. I've kept the place going for the past three years, since I turned 21. When Joe isn't shooting deer in the mountains, he comes in for coffee and a cinnamon bun every morning. He likes to keep an eye on things.

I sure wish he'd been after deer the morning Elsie Thompson blew in.

The place was empty except for me and Lester Keyhoe, who was sitting down the bar where he always does, getting a start on the day's drinking.

I was toweling down the

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counter when the car pulled up. I could see it plain through the window. It was an old Ford that looked like somebody'd driven it a dozen times back and forth through Hell. It sputtered and whinnied for a minute after the ignition key was turned off.

I stopped toweling and just stared. The old gal who jumped out of the Ford was a real sight — short and round, dressed in khakis, with gray hair cut like Buster Brown, and wearing big wire-rimmed glasses. She chewed on some gum like she wanted to kill it. A floppy wicker handbag hung from her arm. I said, "Get a load of this," to Lester, but he didn't even look up.

The screen door opened and she tumped towards the counter in her dusty boots. She hopped onto the stool in front of me. Her jaw went up and down a few times. One time when it was open, the word "coffee" came out.

"Yes, ma'am," I said, and turned away to get it.

"Does this establishment belong to Joseph James Lowry from Chicago?" she asked.

"Sure does," I said, looking at her.

Behind the glasses her round eyes opened and shut in time with her chewing mouth. She gave me a huge grin. "That's mighty good news, young man. I've been driving through every one-horse town west of Chicago looking for this place, looking for Joe Lowry and his damned tavern. There's a place called Joe's in every single one of them. But I knew I'd find Joe Lowry's place sooner or later. Know why? Because I've got will power, that's why. When do you expect him in?"

"Well . . . what did you want to see him about?"

"He *is* coming in?"

I nodded.

"Good. I expected as much. I'm only surprised not to find him behind the counter."

"You know him, huh?"

"Oh, yes. My, yes." Her eyes turned sad for a second. "We used to know each other very well, back in Chicago."

"How about if I give him a ring, tell him you're here?"

"That won't be necessary." Snapping her gum and grinning, she opened the handbag on her lap and pulled out a revolver. Not a peashooter, either — one of those long-barreled .38's. "I'll surprise him," she said. Her stubby little thumb pulled back the hammer and she aimed the thing at me. "We'll surprise him together."

I didn't feel much like talking, but I managed to nod my head.

"What time will Joe be in?" she asked.

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"Pretty soon." I took a deep breath and asked, "You aren't planning to shoot him, are you?"

She pretended like she didn't hear me, and asked, "How soon?"

"Well . . ." Far away, the 10:05 from Parkerville let loose its whistle. "Well, pretty soon, I guess."

"I'll wait for him. Who's that slob over there?"

"That's Lester."

"Lester!" she called.

He turned his head and looked at her. She waved the gun at him, grinning and chewing, but his face didn't change. It looked the same as always, long and droopy like a bloodhound's, but more gloomy.

"Lester," she said, "you just stay right on that stool. If you get up for any reason, I'll shoot you dead."

His head nodded, then turned frontwards again and tipped down at his half-empty glass.

"What's your name?" she asked me.

"Wes."

"Wes, keep Lester's glass full. And don't do anything to make me shoot you. If some more customers come in, just serve them like everything is normal. This revolver has six loads, and I can take down a man with each. I don't want to. I only want Joe Lowry. But if you drive me to it, I'll make this place wall-to-wall corpses. Understand?"

"Sure, I understand." I filled Lester's glass, then came back to the woman. "Can I ask you something?"

"Fire away."

"Why do you want to kill Joe?"

She stopped chewing and squinted at me. "He ruined my life. That's enough reason to kill a man, I think. Don't you?"

"Nothing's a good enough reason to kill Joe."

"Think so?"

"What'd he do to you?"

"He ran off with Martha Dipsworth."

"Martha? That's his wife — was."

"Dead?"

I nodded yes.

"Good." Her jaw chomped, and she beamed. "That makes me glad. Joe made a mistake, not marrying me — I'm still alive and kicking. We'd be happily married to this day if he'd had the sense to stick with me. But he never did have much sense. Do you know what his great ambition was? To go out west and open up a tavern. Martha thought that was a *glor*ious idea. I said, 'Well, *you* marry him, then. Go out west and waste your lives in the boondocks. If Joe's such a romantic fool as to throw his

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life away like that, I don't want him. There're plenty of fish in the sea.' That's what I said. More than thirty years ago."

"If you said that — " I stopped. You don't catch me arguing with an armed woman.

"What?"

"Nothing."

She shifted her chewing gum over to one corner of her mouth and drank some coffee. "What were you going to say?"

"Just . . . well, if you said they could get married, it doesn't seem very fair of you to blame them."

She put down the cup and glanced over at Lester. He still sat there, but he was staring at the gun. "When I said that about the sea being full of fish, I figured it'd only be a matter of time before I'd land a good one. Well, it didn't work out that way."

She chewed a few times, gazing up at me with a funny distance in her eyes as if she was looking back at all the years. "I kept on waiting. I was just sure the right man was around the next corner — around the next year. It finally dawned on me, Wes, that there wasn't ever going to be another man. Joe was it, and I'd lost him. That's when I decided to gun him down."

"That's —"

"What?"

"Crazy."

"It's justice."

"Maybe the two of you could get together. He's unattached since Martha died. Maybe —"

"Nope. Too late for that. Too late for babies, too late for —"

All at once Lester flung himself away from the bar and made a foolish run for the door. The old gal swiveled on her stool, tracked him for a split second, then squeezed off a shot. The bullet took off Lester's earlobe. With a yelp he swung around and ran back to his stool, cupping a hand over what was left of his ear.

"You'd better pray nobody heard that shot," she said to both of us.

I figured nobody would. We were at the tail end of town, so the closest building was a gas station half a block away. The cars passing by on the highway kicked up plenty of noise. And around here, with all the hunting that goes on, nobody pays much attention to a single gunshot unless it's right under his nose.

But I was nervous, anyway. For five minutes we all waited without saying a word. The only sound was her gum snapping.

She finally grinned and squinted as if she'd just won a raffle. "We're in luck."

"Joe's not," I said. "Neither's Lester."

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Lester said nothing. He was pinching his notched ear with one hand and draining his glass with the other.

"They shouldn't have run," the woman said. "That was their mistake — they ran. You aren't going to run, are you?"

"No, ma'am."

"Because if you do I'll shoot you for sure. I'll shoot anyone today. Anyone. This is my day, Wes — the day Elsie Thompson pays Joe back."

"I won't run, ma'am. But I won't let you shoot Joe. I'll stop you one way or another." I went over to fill Lester's glass.

"You can't stop me. No one can stop me. Nothing can. Do you know why? Because I've got will power, that's why."

Grinning mysteriously, she chomped three times on her gum and said, "Today I'm going to die. That gives me all the power in the world. Understand? As soon as I gun down Joe, I'll drive out of this burg. I'll get that old Ford up to seventy, eighty, then I'll pick out the biggest tree —"

I made a sick laugh, and came back to her.

"Think I'm fooling?" she said.

"No, ma'am. It's just kind of funny, you talking like that about crashing into a tree. Not funny ha-ha, funny weird. You know?"

"No."

"That's 'cause you don't know about Joe. He crashed into a tree — an aspen, just off Route 5. That was about three years back. Martha was with him. She got killed, of course. Joe was in real bad shape, and Doc Mills didn't give him much chance. But he pulled through. His face got so broken up he doesn't look quite right, and he lost the use of an eye. His left eye, not his aiming eye. He wears a patch over it, you know. And sometimes when he gets feeling high, he flaps it up and gives us all a peek underneath."

"You can stop that."

"He lost a leg, too."

"I don't want to hear about it."

"Yes, ma'am. I'm sorry. It's just that . . . well, everyone that crashes into a tree doesn't die."

"I will."

"You can't be sure. Maybe you'll just end up like Joe, hobbling around half blind on a fake leg, with your face so scarred up that your best friends won't recognize you."

"Shut up, Wes."

She stuck the pistol into my face, so I slowed down and said quietly, "I just mean, if you want to make sure you die, there's a concrete bridge abutment about a mile up the road."

"Warm up my coffee and keep your mouth shut."

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I turned around to pick up the pot. That's when I heard the footsteps outside. Boots against the wood planks out front, coming closer. I faced Elsie. She grinned at me. Her jaw worked faster on the gum. Her eyes squinted behind her glasses as the unsteady elumping got louder.

Through the window I saw his mussy gray hair, his scarred face with the patch on his left eye. He saw me looking, smiled, and waved.

I glanced at Lester, who was holding a paper napkin to his ear and the glass to his mouth.

Elsie pushed the pistol close to my chest. "Don't move," she whispered.

The screen door swung open.

Elsie spun her stool.

"Duck, Joe!" I cried out.

He didn't duck. He just stood there looking perplexed as Elsie leaped off the stool, crouched, and fired. The first two bullets smacked him square in the chest. The next hit his throat. Then one tore into his shoulder, turning him around so the last shot took him in the small of the back.

All this happened in a couple of seconds as I dived at Elsie. I was in mid-air when she wheeled on me and smashed me in the face with the barrel. I went down.

While I was trying to get up, she jumped over the body and ran out. I reached the door in time to see her car whip backwards. It hit the road with screeching brakes, then laid rubber and was gone.

I went back inside.

Lester was still sitting at the bar. His stool was turned around, and he was staring at the body. I sat down at one of the booths, lit a cigarette, and kept Lester company staring.

We spent a long time like that. After a while I heard the sheriff's siren. Then an ambulance's. The cars screamed by and faded up the road in the direction of the bridge abutment.

"Guess that's Elsie," I said.

Lester just kept staring.

Then the screen door swung open.

"My God!" The big man looked at me, then at Lester, and knelt down over the body. He turned it over. "Gimpy," he muttered. "Poor old Gimpy." He patted the dead conductor on the back, and stood up. His eyes questioned me.

I shook my head. "Some crazy woman," I muttered. "She came in here dead set to kill you, Dad."

"Q"

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a *NEW* Dr. Sam: Johnson story by

LILLIAN de la TORRE

AUTHOR'S NOTE: *When James Boswell first met Dr. Sam: Johnson, in 1763, it was still a fashionable amusement to visit Bethlehem (pronounced Bedlam) Hospital and laugh at the lunatics; and the two friends once made such an excursion, though certainly not to laugh.*

Artists (notably Hogarth) and writers have transmitted to us their impressions of the lot of a madman in a society which still acted as if it thought a madman needed the Devil beaten out of him.

What would be the plight of a sane man mistakenly confined, and how could he regain his liberty? "The Bedlam Bam" answers this question . . .

THE BEDLAM BAM

(as told by James Boswell, May, 1768)

by LILLIAN de la TORRE

"To find my Tom o' Bedlam ten thousand miles I'll travel," chanted the ballad-singer in a thin rusty screech, lustily seconded by the wail of the dirt-encrusted baby in her shawl.

"Mad Maudlin goes with dirty toes to save her shoes from gravel,
Yet will I sing bonny mad boys, Bedlam boys are bonny,
They still go bare and live by air . . ."

All along the fence that separated Bedlam Hospital from the tree-lined walks of Moorfields, ill-printed broadsides fluttered in the breeze, loudly urged upon the public by a cacophony of ballad-sellers. As I flinched at the din, a hand plucked my sleeve, and a voice twittered:

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"Poor Tom o' Bedlam! Tom's a-cold!"

I turned to view a tatterdemalion figure, out at elbow and knee, out at toe and heel, out of breech, with spiky hair on end and claw-like hand extended. As I fumbled for a copper, my wise companion restrained me.

"Let be, Mr. Boswell, the man's a fraud. No Bedlamite has leave to beg these days; they are all withinside. Come along."

Leaving the mock madman to mutter a dispirited curse, we passed through Bedlam gate and approached the noble edifice, so like a palace without, so grim within—as I, a visitor from North Britain, was soon to learn.

Behold us then mounting the step to the entrance pavilion. If "great wits are sure to madness near allied," as the poet has it, then what shall be said of that ill-assorted pair?—Dr. Sam: Johnson, the Great Cham of Literature, portly of mien and rugged of countenance, with myself, his young friend and chronicler, James Boswell, advocate, of Scotland, swarthy of complection and low of stature beside him. Believing London to be the full tide of human existence, he had carried me, that day in May 1768, to see one of the city's strangest sights, Bedlam Hospital, the abode of the frantick and the melancholy mad.

Entering the pavilion, we beheld before us the Penny Gates, attended by a burly porter in blue coat and cap, wearing with importance a silver badge almost as wide as a plate, and holding his silver-tipped staff of office. Beside the flesh and blood figure stood two painted wooden effigies holding jugs, representing gypsies, a he and a she. Though the woman was ugly, we put our pennies into her jug, and heard them rattle down; whereupon the porter passed us in, and we ascended to the upper gallery.

As we came out on the landing, our senses were assailed by a rank stench and a babel of noise, a hum of many voices talking, with an accompaniment of screech and howl that stood my hair on end.

A second blue-gowned attendant passed us through the iron bars of the barrier, and we stood in the long gallery of the men's ward. Around us milled madmen and their visitors in a dense throng, the while vendors shouldered their way through the crush dispensing nuts, fruits, and cheesecakes, and tap-boys rushed pots of beer, though contraband, to the thirsty, whether mad or sane.

Along the wide gallery, tall windows let in the north light. Opposite them were ranged the madmen's cells, each with its heavy

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door pierced with a little barred Judas window. Some doors were shut; but most were open to afford the inmates air. I peeped in the first one with a shudder. A small, unglazed window high up admitted a shaft of sunlight and a blast of cold spring air. For furnishings, there was only a wooden bed-stead piled with straw, and a wooden bowl to eat from; unless you counted a heavy iron chain with a neck loop, stapled to the wall. No one was chained there, however; the fortunate occupant had "the liberty of the corridor," and perhaps stood at my elbow.

Others were not so fortunate. As we strolled forward, we saw through the open doors many a wretch in fetters, chained to the wall, and many a hopeless mope drearily staring.

"Here in Bedlam," remarked my philosophical friend, "tho' secluded from the world, yet we may see the world in microcosm. Here's Pride—"

I looked where he pointed. Through the open door of the next cell, I perceived one who in his disordered intellect imagined himself to be, perhaps, the Great Mogul. He sat on straw as on a throne, he wore his fetters like adornments, and his countenance bore the most ineffable look of self-satisfaction and consequence. For a crown he wore his chamber pot.

"A pride scarce justified," said I with a smile.

"For mortal man, pride is never justified. Here's Anger—"

The sound of blows rang through the corridor. In the neighbouring cell, a red-faced lunatick was furiously beating the straw on his pallet.

"What do you, friend?" enquired a stander-by.

"I beat him for his cruelty!"

"Whom do you beat, sir?"

"The Butcher Duke of Cumberland. Take that! And that!"

"Madmen have long memories," remarked my friend with pity. "The cruelties of the '45 are gone by these twenty years."

The noise had stirred up the menagerie. Pandemonium burst forth. Those who were fettered clanked their chains. Those who were locked in shook the bars. Some howled like wolves. Keepers banging on doors added to the hollobaloo. My friend shuddered.

"God keep us out of such a place!"

"Amen!" said I.

The tumult abated, and we walked on through the throng. A little way along, my friend greeted an acquaintance:

"What, Lawyer Trevelyan, your servant, sir. Miss Cicely, yours.

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Be acquainted with my young friend Mr. Boswell, the Scotch lawyer, who visits London to see the sights with me."

As I bowed I took their measure. The lawyer was tall and sturdy, with little shrewd eyes in a long closed-up face. The girl was small and slim, modestly attired in dove grey. At her slender waist, in the old-fashioned way, she wore a dainty seamstress' hussif with a business-like pair of scissors suspended on a rib-band. Her small quiet face was gently framed by a cap and lappets of lawn. Meeting her candid amber gaze, I was glad I had adorned my person in my gold-laced scarlet coat.

"How do you go on, Mr. Trevelyan? And how does the good man, your uncle Silas, the Turkey merchant?"

"On his account, Dr. Johnson, we are come hither."

"What, is he confined here?"

"Alas, yes. Yonder he stands."

I looked where he pointed. The elder Mr. Trevelyan was a wiry small personage, clad in respectable black. He had a thin countenance, his own white hair to his shoulders, bright black eyes, and a risible look. With a half smile, he listened to the tirade of a distrest fellow inmate, giving now and then a quick nod.

"He has no look of insanity," observed my friend.

"Perhaps not, sir. But the prank that brought him hither was not sane. You shall hear. Being touched with Mr. Wesley's *enthusiasm*—"

"Mr. Wesley is a good man."

"I do not deny it, sir. But my uncle has more zeal than prudence. He abandons his enterprises, and goes about to do good to the poor, in prisons and work-houses and I know not where."

"Call you this lunacy?"

"No, sir. Stay, you shall hear the story. Of a Sunday, sir, he gets up into the pulpit at St. Giles, just as the congregation is assembled. He wears a pair of large muslin wings to his shoulders, and 'Follow me, good people!' he cries, 'Follow me to Heaven!' Whereupon with jerks of his hands he flaps his wings, crows loudly, and prepares to launch himself from the lectern. But the beadle, a man of prompt address, pulls him back, and so he is hustled hither without more ado, and here he must stay lest he do himself a mischief. But never fret, Cicely, I have his affairs well in hand, by power of attorney and so on."

But Cicely had gone impulsively to the old gentleman.

"How do you, Uncle?"

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"Why, my dear, very well. Reflect (smiling) 'tis only in Bedlam a man may speak his mind about kings and prelates without hindrance. And where else can a man find so many opportunities for comforting the afflicted?"

"Yet, dear uncle, it distresses me to see you among them."

"Be comforted, Cicely. 'Tis only a little while, and I shall be enlarged, I promise you. Your cousin Ned will see to it."

A wise wink accompanied this assurance. Cousin Ned sighed.

"All in good time, Cicely."

Since Cicely seemed minded to canvass the subject further, we bowed and retired. The morning was drawing to a close. I was glad to leave the whole scene of madness, and return to the world of the sane.

Nor would I willingly have renewed my visit so soon, had not the dove-grey girl come to us in distress and urgently carried us thither to visit her uncle.

What a change was there! Two weeks before, we had seen him fully cloathed and quite composed. Now as we peeped through the Judas window, we beheld him lying on straw in the chilly cell, his shirt in tatters, his white locks tangled, shackled and manacled to the floor.

"A violent case," said the burly mad-keeper. "I dare not unlock the door."

He dared after all, but only upon receipt of a considerable bribe, and upon condition that he stand by the door with staff in hand.

In a trice Miss Cicely was kneeling by her uncle's side, putting her own cloak about him.

"Alas, how do you, Uncle?"

The eyes he turned upon her were clear and sane.

"Why, very well, dear love," he said. "I have learned what I came here to learn, and more too," he added wryly.

"What have you learned, Uncle?"

"I have learned how the poor madmen here are abused, aye and beaten too, when their poor addled wits make them obstreperous. That staff (nodding towards the blue-coat by the door) is not only for show."

"Alack, Uncle, have you been beaten?"

"Beaten? Aye, and blistered, physicked, drenched with cold water, denied my books, deprived of pen, ink, and paper. And all for a transport of justifiable anger."

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"Anger at what?" enquired Dr. Johnson.

"At my nephew."

"Why, Uncle, what has Ned done?"

"Ned has cozened me. You must know, Dr. Johnson, I am as well in my wits as you are—save for my ill judgement in trusting Ned. You see, sir, Mr. Wesley and his followers are barred from visiting Newgate Gaol—lest they corrupt the inmates, I suppose—and from Bedlam Hospital, lest they make them mad. Well, sir, being determined to know how matters went on behind these doors when they are closed, I resolved to make myself an inmate. I gave Ned—more fool me—my power of attorney and a letter that should enlarge me when I so desired, and by enacting a little comedy, with muslin wings, I got myself brought hither; in full confidence that Ned would see me released when I chose."

"Well, sir?"

"Well, sir, when I gave Ned the word to produce my letter and release me, this Judas Iscariot looks me in the eye, and says he, 'What letter? The poor man is raving.' All came clear in a flash. Ned has no intention of enlarging me. Why should he, when he has my power of attorney, and may make ducks and drakes of my fortune at his pleasure? Nay, he is my heir. What are my chances, think you, of coming out of here alive? Do you wonder I was ready to throttle the scoundrel? But they pulled me from him, and I have been chained down ever since. The keepers are bribed, I suppose. To my expostulations they turn a deaf ear. If not for Cicely, my plight need never have been known."

"Alack, Dr. Johnson," cried Cicely, "now what's to be done?"

"Have no fear, my dear. When next the Governors of the hospital meet, they shall hear the story, and he'll be released, I warrant you."

That very Saturday at nine of the clock we presented ourselves in the Court Room of the hospital. This handsome chamber is located abovestairs in the central pavilion, a gracious room with large windows overlooking Moorfields, a ceiling of carven plaster, and painted coats of arms about the walls.

Here sat the Governors, a stately set of men in full-bottom wigs and wide-skirted coats. My eye picked out Dr. John Monro, head surgeon, a formidable figure with bushy eyebrows, a belligerent snub nose, a short upper lip over prominent dog-teeth, a vinous complection, and a bulldog cast of countenance; for upon his say-

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so, in the end, depended our friend's freedom or incarceration.

Four of us came to speak for him that morning: James Boswell, lawyer, Dr. Johnson, his friend, and Miss Cicely, his kinswoman. To strengthen our ranks, we brought a medical man, Dr. Robert Levett, Dr. Johnson's old friend, who for twenty years had dwelt in his house and attended him at need. He was a little fellow of grotesque and uncouth appearance, his knobby countenance half concealed by a bushy full-bottom wig. He wore a voluminous rusty black coat, and old-fashioned square-toed shoes to his feet. Thus ceremoniously attired, he came with us to speak as a physician in support of Mr. Silas Trevelyan's sanity.

Then they brought him in, and my heart misgave me. Gaunt, ragged, in chains, with his white hair on end—was this man sane? At his benevolent greeting to us, however, and his respectful bow to the committee assembled, I took heart again. As the blue-coated warders ranged themselves beside him, for fear of some disorderly outbreak, the gentlemen seated along the dais scanned him intently, and he looked serenely back.

Footsteps hurrying up the stair announced yet another participant, and nephew Edward Trevelyan appeared precipitately in the wide doorway—heir, attorney, and nearest of kin to the supposed madman, all in one.

The proceedings began. Dr. Johnson was eloquent, Dr. Levett earnest and scientifick, Miss Cicely modest and low-spoken. I was furnished forth with legal instances. Our one difficulty was in explaining how, if he was sane, our friend had gotten himself into Bedlam in the first place. We dared not say, in effect, "He came in voluntarily, as a spy." We skirted the subject, and concentrated upon his present state of restored sanity.

"We have now," said Dr. Monro, "only to hear from Mr. Edward Trevelyan, the inmate's attorney and kinsman. Mr. Trevelyan?"

Cousin Ned unfolded his length, rolled up his little eyes, and spoke softly in a deep resonant voice:

"Grieved I am to say it," he began, "my friends over there mistake my poor uncle's condition. He can be sly and plausible, sirs, but with me, whom he trusts"—Old Mr. Trevelyan stiffened, and Cicely put a dismayed hand to her mouth—"with me he speaks otherwise. His brain still swarms with lunatick fancies. He proposes to get upon the roof and with his wings elude them all, and a good job too, says he, for the Governor is a puppy that wants a cannister to his tail, and Dr. Monro is a cork-brained clunch—"

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With a roar the uncle broke from his keepers and flung himself upon his nephew.

"Thou prevaricating pup! Thou lying leech! Thou Judas! Where is my letter that I gave thee for my safety?"

"The man is mad," growled Dr. Monro. "Take him away, and let him be close confined."

We four met again next morning for breakfast in Johnson's Court. We shared a loaf, and little Levett brewed pot after pot of tea, for which Dr. Johnson's capacity was vast.

"And now," pronounced Dr. Johnson, setting down his cup at last, "what's to be done next for our incarcerated friend, Mr. Silas Trevelyan? He cannot stay where he is. Chains and fetters would soon drive the sanest man mad."

"If we could perswade the keepers he is sane?" suggested Miss Cicely timidly.

"After Dr. Monro's verdict," said I, "how can we so? We can never get him away openly."

"Then we must bring him away covertly," said Dr. Johnson. "Can you not, Mr. Boswell, devise some bam that shall bamboozle the keepers and set Mr. Silas free?"

"Let me think. What do you say, sir, if we take a leaf from Shakespeare, and deliver our friend, like Falstaff, in a bucking-basket of foul linen?"

"Chain and all?"

"True, there's the chain."

"Take a leaf from *Romeo and Juliet*, and they'll undo the chain fast enough, I warrant you," mused little Levett.

Johnson frowned; then smiled: "We'll try it."

Accordingly we spent the best part of the day concerting our measures and assembling our properties. As the afternoon wore on, our physician was furnished forth with a bagful of flasks and vials, clean linen, and money to spend, and so departed for Bedlam to acquaint Mr. Silas with our plan, and put things in motion. We set our rendezvous there for midnight.

Punctually at midnight, we two, escorting Miss, drove up to Bedlam gate in a hackney coach. A cart followed us, with a large pine box for freight. Instructing our Jehus to stand, we rang the porter's bell. That functionary presently appeared, rubbing sleep from his eyes.

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We soon saw that our precursor had opened the way for us by his authority as a medical man, plus, I doubt not, a judicious outlay of cash bribes. When we named our stricken friend, Mr. Silas Trevelyan, the fellow looked grave, passed us up the stair, and went yawning back to his hole.

At the barred gate on the landing, a second blue-coated warder was ready with the keys. They hung by a loop at his broad leather belt. As he selected and turned the right one, I scrutinized him narrowly, for upon his behavior depended, in part, the success of our scheam.

The fellow was tall and muscular, as befitted one who was often called upon to grapple with lunaticks. Little squinting eyes in a broad doughy face gave him a look more dogged than quick. True to his looks, he dogged us close as we entered the ward.

The long shadowy corridor was empty; the madmen had all been sequestered for the night. Eerie noises attested to their presence behind the locked doors: a snore and a snort here, a patter of prayer there, an occasional howl or screech of laughter that shocked the ear.

One door only was open, whence faint candle light fell along the floor. Dr. Levett stood in the doorway.

"Be brave, my dear," said he to Cicely, taking her hand. "He is very far gone, and turning black. He has sent for you, only to give you his last blessing. Stand back, fellow (to the mad-keeper), these moments are sacred."

The warder, looking solemn, took up his stance by the door, and we passed within. Our friend Mr. Silas lay on his straw pallet, his eyes turned up in his head. Out of respect for his obviously moribund condition, his chains had been removed.

As Dr. Levett advanced the candle and pushed back the tangled locks, I saw the awful leaden blackness of the skin. Had I not been prepared for it, I should have been shocked. Even prepared, Miss Cicely clung to my hand as she whispered:

"How do you, Uncle?"

The dark eyes came into focus upon her.

"Ill, ill, my dear," he breathed. "The lawyer—is he here?"

"I am here, sir."

"Then write my last will—quickly. To my niece—every thing to my niece."

His head dropped back. Dr. Levett held a draught to his lips. I drew forth my tablets and wrote down his bequest the briefest

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way. Faltering fingers signed it, and Dr. Johnson added his firm neat signature as witness.

"Take it, Cicely," murmured the testator. She slipped it into her bodice. "And," the failing voice continued, "may Heaven bless you. I forgive—"

The voice died, the white head dropped back, the jaw fell. Dr. Levett touched the slack wrist. Swiftly he closed the eyelids and drew the sheet over the darkened face.

"Our friend is no more," he pronounced gravely.

"What, dead?" ejaculated the mad-keeper, starting forward.

"Stand back!" cried Dr. Levett. "On your life, stand back! Such a death has not been these hundred years in England, for our friend is dead of the Black Plague! Look at his face—"

He flicked back the sheet and momentarily by the pale light of the candle revealed the blackened countenance; at which the mad-keeper started back with an oath.

"Now hark'ee, my friend," began Dr. Johnson portentously, "be guided by me: were this known, there would be rioting within these walls; what keeper would be safe? Do you but keep silence, all shall be decently done by us, his friends. He shall be gone by morning, and the episode forgotten. Nor shall you be the loser," he added, fingering his pocket suggestively.

The fellow was stupid, which suited us; but so stupid that precious moments went past while we strove to make him see the supposed seriousness of the situation. Not so another keeper, a dark-visaged fellow with a squint who happened by. Hearing that Mr. Silas Trevelyan had but now died of the Black Death, he at once clapped a dirty handkerchief to his nose, and clattered off down the stair.

The first fellow was still mumbling when Dr. Levett settled the matter. He advanced the candle, clapped a hand to the fellow's face, and cried out:

"What, friend! 'Tis too late! You have taken the infection! You are all of a sweat, and turning black! (And so he was, glistening with ink from Levett's hand.) A clyster! Only a clyster will save you now! This way! To your own quarters!"

Speaking thus urgently, the physician steered the terrified fellow in the direction of his lair in the attick. We were left to do the last offices for the "dead," who lay motionless, looking more risible now than ever.

The supposed corpse was neatly laid out, cocooned in his wind-

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ing sheet, when Dr. Levett appeared in the gallery alone, chuckling.

"A good strong enema—that will take care of the keeper," said he with a grin. "He'll be busy for a while. Come, let us go."

"Go!" cried Dr. Johnson. "Without the keeper, how are we to make our way through the barriers?"

"With his keys," said Levett, and produced them. "A clyster is a powerfully distracting operation. 'Twas child's play to get at the keys, though under his nose."

"Well done, Mr. Levett. Come, let us go."

Among us we made shift to carry the sheeted body through the barred gate, down the wide stair, and out at the portal, which the largest key unlocked, not without an alarming screech. A snore from the porter's lodge gave us Godspeed. Dawn light was greying the sky as we lifted our burden into the waiting cart. We eased the sheeted figure into the pine coffin. I lowered the lid, and Dr. Johnson screwed it lightly down.

"—in case we encounter the curious. 'Tis but until we get clear of the grounds," he reassured his friend in an undertone.

I noted with approval that underneath the bow of crape that mournfully adorned the lid, auger holes had been bored to provide the "corpse" air to breathe.

The carter, a scrawny pock-marked boy, was regarding our proceedings between alarm and superstitious awe.

"Is he dead? I'll have no part in it! Give me my money and get him out of my cart!"

By paying a double fee, we managed to retain the cart; but the carter took to his heels. I must perforce take the reins. Miss elected to share my lot. She could not be persuaded to leave her uncle in my hands, but sat herself determinedly upon his coffin. Dr. Johnson and Mr. Levett mounted the hackney coach without us.

We had wasted precious time. Before we could drive off, we were intercepted. Two fellows came up at the run. One wore the blue coat of a mad-keeper. I recognized the swarthy keeper who had sheered off so quickly. Now it became clear: the fellow was one of Ned's tools, and had run off, not to shun infection, but to inform; for his companion was Ned.

"Alas, my uncle!" said the false, mellifluous voice. "Why was I not notified? As his heir—"

"We have performed the last offices," said Dr. Johnson coldly

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from the coach, "and you shall hear further. We'll not bandy words at Bedlam gate. Drive on, Mr. Boswell."

I drove on.

How it fell out I know not, but I missed my rendezvous in the leafy walks of Moorfields. It was not the coach that overtook me, but a pair of footpads coming suddenly out of the shadows.

"Stand and deliver!"

A weapon glinted, and a rough hand pulled me from the high seat.

"Stay, you mistake," I cried; "here is no treasure chest—"

But the two fellows were up and slapping the reins, and off they went, cart and coffin and Miss and all; and as I stood dumbfounded, there floated back to me the girl's despairing cry:

"Cousin Ned!"

Here was calamity indeed. I could think of no better plan than to bellow "Stop thief!" which I did with a will. Wheels crunched on gravel, and the coach drew up beside me. Little Levett reached a hand and pulled me inside.

When he had heard my story, Dr. Johnson looked utterly grave.

"What have we done? We have delivered our friend, out of Bedlam indeed, straight into the hands of his enemy!"

"And his heir!" exclaimed Dr. Levett.

"No, sir," I corrected him. "Recall, sir, that as part of the comedy of the 'death bed,' I made his will. 'Every thing to my niece.' The girl is his heir."

"But does her venal cousin know that?"

"She knows it," said Levett wryly. "She need not lift a finger. She has only to let him be buried, and his fortune is hers."

"Great Heavens!" I cried. "That innocent face!"

"Innocent faces have masked murderous hearts before now," mused Dr. Johnson. "*Vide* Mary Blandy, *vide* your own Katharine Nairn."

"I'll never believe it," said I stoutly.

"Believe it or no, we must act to save him, and quickly."

"The more quickly," said Levett urgently, "that in too slavish imitation of *Romeo and Juliet*, I have made him helpless with a sleeping draught."

"Thus, then, the matter stands," Johnson summed up. "The lawyer thinks himself the heir. Perhaps he supposes he is in possession of his uncle's corpse. If so, he will bury him, thus rendering him a corpse indeed. Perhaps he has unscrewed the coffin lid

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and found a sleeping man. What is to hinder him from quietly doing away with him? Either way, he looks to inherit."

"And perhaps he is in concert with Miss, they'll bury him and split the swag," suggested Levett.

I shook my head vehemently.

"We must find him," said Dr. Johnson. "There is one hope yet. No one at all will inherit, if the old gentleman is not known to be dead. They cannot inter him secretly. Come, let us make inquiries. They all dwell together in a house in Jasper Street. To Jasper Street, coachman."

Jasper Street was nearby. There all was silent. No cart stood before the door, but as we stood knocking, a manservant trudged up. He stared.

"Han't you heard? I have just carried the news to our nearest friends. The master is dead of a mighty infection. They daren't keep him. His sermon will be preached as soon as may be, and so they'll put him hastily under ground."

"Where, friend?"

"At the parish church, where else, St. Giles Cripplegate."

Without further parley we drove off in haste. As we turned into the street called London Wall, we heard the great bell of St. Giles begin to toll. A few moments more, and we were there. The east transept door was nearest, and we entered in haste. A charnel-house smell seemed to taint the dusky air. It emanated from the opened vault before the Trevelyan monument, where soon the deceased must be inhumed.

Was he deceased? Within that plain pine coffin forward in the aisle, sleeping or waking, did he still live? Could we bring him off alive from this peril we had put him in?

My eye sought the chief mourner where he sat in his forward pew. Nephew Ned wore a black mourning cloak, and made play with a large cambrick handkerchief. Miss was not beside him.

Then I saw her, kneeling at the coffin foot in her dove-grey gown, clinging woth both hands to the edge. As I looked, the sexton tried to detach her from this unseemly pose, but she shook her head and clung.

From the pulpit the sermon was already flowing over us in a glutinous tide. The deceased was a mirror of all the works of mercy, visiting the sick, the imprisoned, the distracted, and now gone to his reward in the blessed hope of the resurrection,

"For verily he shall rise again—"

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Miss Cicely stood up suddenly. A long creaking rasp set my teeth on edge as the coffin lid was slowly pushed up, and a sheeted figure rose to a sitting position.

The parson gabbled a prayer, ladies shrieked, and Lawyer Trevelyan uttered a most unseemly curse.

Helped by Cicely, the supposed corpse put back his cerements and bowed to the startled company.

"I thank you, Reverend," said Mr. Silas coolly, "for your good opinion, and you, my friends, for paying me my honours, tho' prematurely. 'Tis too long a tale, how I came hither thus. Suffice it to say, I am neither dead nor mad, and I desire you will all join me at my house to break fast in celebration. You, nephew, need not come. You'll hear from me later. But you, dear niece, give me your hand. Come, friends, let us go."

So saying, in his madman's rags as he was, wearing his winding-sheet like a cloak, handing Miss Cicely, he led the way down the center aisle. We fell in behind him, and so the strange procession came to the house in Jasper Street. There the dumbfounded servants served the old gentleman his own funeral baked meats (hastily fetched from the nearby tavern).

Only when the general company had dispersed did we learn the full story of those hours between the time the coffin was stolen by nephew Ned, and the time we found it lying in the church to be preached over.

"The rattling of the cart awoke me," said old Trevelyan, "for your sleeping draught, sir (to Dr. Levett) was not so very strong. When I heard my nephew's voice, I knew my situation was precarious indeed. I kept silence, only thanking Dr. Johnson for his foresight in screwing down the lid."

"What is screwed may be unscrewed," remarked Dr. Johnson, "that was the most of my concern."

"That it was not," said Mr. Silas, "we may thank this brave girl here. She sat upon the lid, and would not stir, and between seeming stubborn grief and the menace of infection, she kept her cousin at a distance. She never budged from my side. Only after Ned had left my coffin in the aisle and was gone to instruct the parson and the sexton, did I hear the screws turn in the lid."

"How, with what, then, Miss Cicely, did you make shift to turn them?" asked Dr. Johnson.

"The scissors of a hussif, sir, have more use than snipping thread. But, sir," she went on, with a smile that irradiated her

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quiet face, "I dared not lift the lid while my cousin ruled. I still clung tight to the coffin, hoping, sir (to Dr. Johnson), for your arrival to protect us. When I saw you in the doorway, I whispered, 'Now, Uncle—' and the rest you know."

"A very pretty resurrection scene," remarked my friend with a smile.

" 'Tis not every man," added Mr. Trevelyan, "that lives to hear his own eulogy preached. I am your debtor, sir (to Dr. Levett), for that privilege. To you, gentlemen three, I owe my liberty; and to you, dear Cicely, having fallen into Ned's hands, I am well assured I owe my life. I have made you my heir in a mummery, my dear: you shall be so in earnest."

"Q"

NEXT MONTH . . .

11 *NEW* stories — including

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a *NEW* crime story by

RUTH RENDELL

Ruth Rendell continues to replenish our faith in the vitality of the contemporary crime story. Long may she wave her magic wand! . . . Here is the story of a "loner"—a man who hated people but to whom "animals were drawn as by a magnet," a man who "was a stranger to the whole world of men," a man capable of—well, you won't forget Dick for a long time. . .

ALMOST HUMAN

by RUTH RENDELL

The Chief was stretched out on the settee, half asleep. Monty sat opposite him, bolt-upright in his chair. Neither the Chief nor Monty moved as Dick helped himself to gin and water. They didn't care for strong drink, the Chief not even for the smell of it, though it wasn't his way to show his feelings. Monty would sometimes drink beer in the George Tavern with Dick. It was cigarette smoke that upset Monty, and now as he caught a whiff from Dick's Capstan he sneezed.

"Bless you," said Dick.

Better smoke the rest of it in the kitchen while he was getting their supper. It wasn't fair to Monty to start him coughing at his age and perhaps bring on his bronchitis. There was nothing Dick wouldn't have done for Monty's comfort, but when he had taken the meat out of the fridge and gone once more into the sitting room for his drink, it was the Chief he addressed. Monty was his friend and the best company in the world. You couldn't look on the Chief in that light, but more as a boss to be respected and deferred to.

"Hungry, Chief?" he said.

The Chief got off the settee and walked into the kitchen. Dick went after him. It was almost dark outside now but enough light remained for Dick

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to see Monty's coat, the old checked one, still hanging on the clothesline. Better take it in in case it rained during the night.

Dick went out into the yard, hoping against hope that old Tom, his next-door neighbor, wouldn't see the kitchen light and come out. Such hope was always in vain. Dick had got the first of the clothespins out when he heard the door open and then the cracked whining voice.

"Going to be a cold night."

"Mmm," said Dick.

"Shouldn't be surprised if there was to be a frost."

Who cared? Dick saw the great angular shadow of the Chief appear in the rectangle of light. Good, that would fix him. Standing erect, as he now was against the fence, the Chief's shadow was a good head taller than old Tom who backed away, grinning nervously.

"Come on, Chief," said Dick. "Suppertime."

"Just like children, aren't they?" Old Tom whined. "Almost human, it's uncanny. Look at him. He understands every word you say."

Dick didn't answer. He followed the Chief into the kitchen and slammed the door. Nothing angered him more than the way people thought they were paying compliments to animals by comparing them with people. As if the Chief and Monty weren't in every way, mentally, physically, morally, a hundred times better than any human being he'd ever known.

"Just like children"—what a load of nonsense. Children wanting their supper would be crying, making a nuisance of themselves, getting under his feet. His dogs, patient, stoical, single-minded, sat still and silent, watching while he filled the earthenware bowls with chunks of meat and vitamin supplement. And when the bowls were placed side by side on the floor, the two dogs moved toward them with placid dignity.

Dick watched them feed. Monty's appetite, at fourteen, was as good as ever, though he took longer about it than the Chief. His teeth weren't what they had been. When the old dog had cleared his plate he did what he'd always done ever since he was a pup—he came over to Dick and laid his gray muzzle in the palm of the outstretched hand. Dick fondled his ears.

"Good old dog," Dick said. He scorned the popular way of calling a dog "boy." Dogs weren't boys. Boys were dirty and smelly and noisy and uncontrolled. "You're a cracker, you are. You're a fine old dog."

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The Chief behaved in a grander manner. Such signs of affection and gratitude would have been inconsistent with his pedigree and his dignified presence. Dick and Monty knew their place and they both stepped aside to allow the Chief to pass majestically through the doorway and resume his position on the settee. Dick pushed Monty's chair nearer to the radiator. Half-past six. Dick finished his gin.

"I have to go out now," he said, "but I'll be back by ten at the latest, so you get a bit of shuteye and when I come back we'll all have a good walk. Okay?"

Monty came to the front door with him. He always had and always would, though his hind legs were stiff with rheumatism. We all have to get old, Dick thought. I'll have to face up to it, I'm going to lose him this year or next.

He knelt down by the door and did what he'd never done to man, woman, or child—he did something that sickened him when he saw it done by human beings to human beings. Holding Monty's head in his hands, he pressed his lips to the wrinkled forehead. Monty wagged his tail and emitted little grunts of happiness. Dick closed the door and got his car out of the garage.

He drove it three hundred yards down the street to the phone box. For business he never used his own phone, but one or the other of the call boxes between his house and the George Tavern. Five minutes to go and the bell inside it would begin to ring. Unless something had gone wrong again, of course. Unless, once more, things weren't working out the way she'd planned them.

The stupid—what? Dick hated the habit of using the names of female animals—bitch, cow, mare—as insulting epithets for women. When he wanted to express his loathing for the sex he chose one of the succint four-letter words or the five-letter one that was the worst he could think of—woman. He used it now, rolling it on his tongue. Stupid, greedy, damned *woman*!

When his watch showed nearly a quarter to seven, he went into the phone box. He only had to wait sixty seconds. The bell began to ring on the dot of a quarter to. Dick lifted the receiver and spoke the password that would indicate to her it was he and not some interfering busybody answering the phone.

He'd never heard her voice before. It was high-pitched, nervous, very upper-class, a

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thousand miles from any world in which he'd ever moved. "It's going to be all right tonight," she said.

"About time," said Dick. All their previous transactions had been arranged through his contact and every plan had come to grief because of a delay at her end. It must be at least six weeks since he'd had the tipoff and been paid the first installment. "Let's have it then."

She cleared her throat. "Listen, I don't want you to know anything about us—who I am or who he is, where we live or anything about us. Agreed?"

As if he cared who they were or what dirty passions had brought her to this conspiracy. "It's nothing to me," he said. "Just get on with it."

"All right. He's not been well but he's better now and he's started taking his usual walk again. He'll take it tonight. He'll leave the house at half-past eight and walk through the West Heath path towards the Finchley Road. You don't have to know where he's going, that's not your business."

"I couldn't care less."

"Good. It'll be best for you to wait in one of the lonelier parts of the path, as far from the houses as you can."

"You can leave all that to me. I know the area. How'll I know it's him?"

"He's fifty, well-built, middle height, silver hair—he won't be wearing a hat. He'll have on an overcoat with a fur collar, black with a black fur collar. He ought to get to the middle of West Heath path by ten to nine." The voice wavered slightly. "It won't be—too messy, will it? How will you do it?"

"D'you expect me to tell you that on the phone?"

"No. No, perhaps not. You've had the first thousand?"

"For six weeks," said Dick.

"I couldn't help the delay. It wasn't my fault. You'll get the rest within a week, in the same way you got the first."

"Through the usual channel. Is that all I have to know?"

"I think so," she said. "There's one other thing—no, it doesn't matter." She hesitated. "You won't fail me, will you? Tonight's the last chance. If it doesn't happen tonight, there's no point in its happening at all. The whole situation changes tomorrow and I won't—"

"Goodbye," said Dick, slamming down the receiver to cut short the voice that was beginning to grow hysterical. He didn't want to know any of the circumstances or be involved in her sick emotions. *Woman*! Not that he had any qualms. He would have killed a dozen men for what she was paying him to kill one, and he was interested

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only in the money. What did it matter to him who he was or who she was or why she wanted the man out of the way? She might be his wife or his mistress. So what? Such relationships were alien to Dick, and the thought of what they implied nauseated him—kissing, embracing, the acts they did like—no, not like animals. Animals were decent, decorous—not like people. He spat into the corner of the phone box and came out into the cold evening air.

As he drove up toward Hampstead, he thought of the money. It would be just enough to bring his accumulated savings to his target. For years, ever since he'd got Monty from the pet shop, he'd been working to this end. Confidence tricks, a couple of killings, occasional beatings—they'd all been lucrative; and by living modestly—the food for the dogs was his biggest expense—he'd got nearly enough to buy the house he'd had his eye on.

The house was in Scotland, on the northwest coast and miles from a village—a granite croft with enough grounds round it for Monty and the Chief to run free all day. He liked to think of the way they'd look when they saw their own bit of moorland, their own rabbits to chase. He'd have sufficient left over to live on without working for the rest of his life, and maybe he'd get more animals, a horse perhaps, a couple of goats. But no more dogs while Monty was alive. That wouldn't be fair, and it seemed wrong, the height of treachery, to make plans for after Monty was dead.

What there wouldn't be anywhere in the vicinity of his house were people. With luck he wouldn't hear a human voice from one month's end to another. The human race, its ugly face, would be excluded forever. In those hills with Monty and the Chief he'd forget how for forty years people had pressed around him with their cruelty and their baseness—his drunken savage father, his mother who'd cared only for men and having a good time. Then, later, the foster home, the reform school, the factory girls sniggering at his shyness and his acne'd face, the employers who wouldn't hire him because he had a record instead of an education. At last he'd have peace—quiet, comfortable peace.

So he had to kill a man to get it and it wouldn't be the first time. He would kill him without passion or interest, as easily as the slaughterer kills the lamb and with as little mercy. A light blow to the head first,

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just enough to stun him—Dick wasn't worried about giving pain, but about getting blood on his clothes—and then that decisive pressure just here, on the hyoid.

Fingering his own neck to site the spot, Dick parked the car and went into a pub for another small gin and water and a sandwich. The licensee's cat came and sat on his knee. Animals were drawn to him as by a magnet. They knew who their friends were. Pity really that the Chief had such a hatred of cats, otherwise he might have thought of adding a couple to his Scottish menagerie.

Half-past seven. Dick always allowed himself plenty of time to do a job—take it slowly, that was the right way. He put the cat gently on the floor.

By eight he'd driven up through Hampstead village, along Branch Hill by the Whitestone Pond, and parked the car in West Heath Road. A fine starry night, frosty too, like that old fool of a neighbor had said it would be. For a few minutes he sat in the car, turning over in his mind whether there was anything at all to connect him with the woman he'd spoken to. No, there was nothing. His regular contact was as reliable and trustworthy as any human being could be—which wasn't saying that much—and the method of handing over the money was foolproof. As for associating him with the man he was going to kill—Dick knew well that the only safe murder is the murder of a complete stranger. Fortunately for him and his clients Dick was a stranger to the whole world of men.

Better go up and look at the path now. He put the car in Templewood Avenue as near as he could to the point where the path left it to wind across West Heath. This was just to be on the safe side. There weren't any real risks, but it was always as well to insure a quick getaway.

He strolled to the path. It led between the fences of gardens, a steep lane about five feet wide, with steps here and there where the incline grew too sharp. At the summit was a street lamp and another about fifty yards farther on where the path became walled. Between the lights was a broader sandy space, dotted with trees and shrubs.

He'd do it here, Dick decided. He'd stand among the trees until the man appeared from the walled end, wait until he'd left the first pool of light but hadn't yet reached the second, and catch him in the darkest part. No roofs were visible, only the backs of large gardens, jungly

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and black, and though the stars were bright, the moon was a thin white curve that gave little light.

Luckily the bitter cold was keeping most people indoors. As soon as this thought had passed through his mind, he heard footsteps in the distance, and his hand tightened on the padded metal bar in his pocket. But not yet, surely? Not at twenty-five past eight? Or had that fool woman made another of her blasted mistakes? No, this was a girl. The click of her heels told him that, and then he saw her emerge into the lamplight.

With a kind of sick curiosity he watched her approach—a tall slim girl, yet with those repulsive bulges under her coat. She walked swiftly and nervously in this lonely place, casting sharp birdlike glances to the right and the left, her whole body deformed by the tight stupid clothes she wore and the stiff stance her heels gave her. No animal grace, no self-assurance.

Dick would dearly have loved to give her a scare, jump at her and shake her till her teeth chattered, or chase her down those steps. But the idea of unnecessary contact with human flesh repelled him. Besides, she'd see his face and know him when they found the body and raised the hue and cry. What would happen to Monty and the Chief if they caught Dick and put him inside? The thought made him shudder.

He let the girl pass and settled down to wait again. A thin wrack of cloud passed across the stars. All to the good if it got a bit darker . . . Twenty to nine. The man would have left by now and would be coming up to the Whitestone Pond.

Dick would have liked a cigarette but he decided it wasn't worth the risk. The smell might linger and alert the man. Again he fingered the metal bar and the thin coil of picture cord. In a quarter of an hour, with luck, it would all be over. Then back home to the Chief and Monty for their evening walk, and tomorrow he'd get on to that house agent he'd seen advertising in the Sunday paper.

Completely isolated, Dick thought; the house would be completely isolated and with plenty of land, but near the sea. The Chief would enjoy a swim, though he'd probably never had one in his life, spent as it had been in the dirty back street of a city. But all dogs could swim by the light of nature. Different from human beings who had to be taught the way they had to be taught every stupid thing they undertook.

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Footsteps. Yes, it was time. Ten to nine, and evidently the man was of a punctual habit. So much the worse for him. Dick kept perfectly still, staring at the dark hole between the walls, until the vague shape of his quarry appeared.

As the man came toward the light, Dick tensed, closing his hand over the bar. Her description had been precise. It was a stoutish figure that the lamplight showed him, its gleam falling on thick silver hair and the glossy black fur of a coat collar. If Dick had ever felt the slightest doubt as to the morality of what he was about to do, that sight would have dispelled it. Did scum like that ever pause to think of the sufferings of trapped animals, left to die in agony just to have their pelts stuck on some damn rich capitalist's coat? Dick gathered saliva in his mouth and spat silently but viciously into the undergrowth.

The man advanced casually and confidently and the dark space received him. Dick stepped out from among the trees, raised his arm and struck. The man gave a grunt, not much louder than a hiccup, and fell heavily. There was no blood, not a spot.

Bracing himself to withstand the disgust that contact with a warm heavily fleshed body would bring, Dick thrust his arms under the sagging shoulders and dragged the man under the lamp. He was unconscious and would be for five minutes—except that in five minutes, or less, he'd be dead.

Dick didn't waste time examining the face. He had no interest in it. He put his cosh back in his pocket and brought out the cord. A slipknot here, slide it round here, then a quick tightening of pressure on the hyoid—

A soft sound stayed him, the cord still slack in his hands. It wasn't a footstep he'd heard but a light padding. He turned sharply. Out of the darkness, tail erect, nose to ground, came a dog, a black and tan and white basset. It was one of the handsomest dogs Dick had ever seen, but he didn't want to see it now. Damn, he thought, it was bound to come up to him—they always did.

And sure enough the hound hesitated as it entered the patch of light where Dick was kneeling. It lifted its head and advanced on him, waving its tail. Dick cursed fate, not the dog, and held out his hand.

"Good dog," he whispered. "You're a cracker. You're a fine dog, you are. But get away from here now, go off home."

The hound resisted his hand with an aloof politeness, and

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bypassing him, thrust its nose against the unconscious man's face. Dick didn't like that much. The guy might wake up.

"Come on now," he said, laying his hands firmly on the glossy tricolor coat. "This is no place for you. You get on with your hunting or whatever."

But the basset wouldn't go. Its tail trembled and it whined. It looked at Dick and back at the man and began to make those soft hound cries that are halfway between a whimper and a whistle. And then Dick loosened his hold on the dog's thick warm pelt. A terrible feeling had come over him, a dread coupled with nausea. He felt in the pocket of the black fur-collared coat and brought out what he was afraid to find there—a plaited leather dog leash.

That damned woman! Was that what she'd meant about one other thing but it didn't matter? That this guy would be coming along here because he was taking his dog for a walk? Didn't matter! It didn't matter the poor little devil seeing its owner murdered and then having to make its own way home across one of the busiest main roads out of London.

Or maybe she'd thought he'd kill the dog, too. The sheer inhumanity of it made Dick's blood boil. He wanted to kick the man's face as it lay there; but he didn't like to, couldn't somehow, with the dog looking on.

He wouldn't be balked, though. His house in Scotland was waiting for him. He owed it to the Chief and Monty to get that house. All that money wasn't going to be given up just because she'd gone and got things wrong again. There were ways. Like putting the dog on the leash and taking him back across the road by the Whitestone Pond. He'd be safe then. And so by that time, Dick thought, would his owner who was already stirring and moaning.

Or Dick could put the basset in the car. The Lord knew he was gentle enough, utterly trusting, not suspecting what Dick had done or was going to do. And then? Kill the man and take the dead man's dog home? Be seen with the dog in his car? That was a laugh. Tie the dog to a lamp post? He'd never in his life tied up a dog and he wasn't going to start now.

A cold despair took hold of him. He bore the dog no grudge, felt no anger, nothing more than the helpless resignation of a father whose child has come into a room and interrupted his lovemaking. The child comes first—inevitably.

Slowly he put away the cord.

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He lifted the silver head roughly and the man groaned. There had been a hard object in the pocket where the leash was, a brandy flask. Dick uncapped it and poured some of the liquid down the man's throat. The hound watched, thumping its tail.

"Where—where am I? What—what happened?"

Dick didn't bother to answer him.

"I had a—a bang on the head. God, my head's sore. I was mugged, wasn't I?" He felt in his pocket and produced a wallet. "Not touched, thank God. I'll—I'll try to sit up. That's better. Where's Bruce? Oh, there he is. Good boy, Bruce. I'm glad you're all right."

"He's a fine dog," Dick said remotely, and then, "Come on, you'd better hang onto me. I've got a car."

"You're most kind, most kind. What a blessing for me you came along when you did."

Dick said nothing. He almost threw up when the man clung to his arm and leaned on him. Bruce anchored to his leash, they set off down the steps to the car. It was a relief to be free of that touch, that solid weight that smelled of the sweat of terror. Dick got Bruce onto the back seat and stroked him, murmuring reassuring words.

The house he was directed to was a big one, a mansion on the East Heath. Lights blazed in its windows. Dick hauled the man out and propelled him up to the front door, leaving Bruce to follow. He rang the bell and a uniformed maid answered it. Behind her, in the hall, stood a tall young woman in evening dress.

She spoke the one word, "Father!" and her voice was sick with dismay. But it was the same voice. Dick recognized it, just as she recognized his when, turning away from the glimpse of wealth in that hall, he said, "I'll be off now."

Their eyes met. Her face was chalk-white, made distorted and ugly by the destruction of her hopes. She let her father take her arm and then she snapped, "What happened?"

"I was mugged, dear, but I'm all right now. This gentleman happened to come along at the opportune moment. I haven't thanked him properly yet." He put out his hand to Dick. "You must let me have your name. You must come in. No, I insist. You probably saved my life—I could have been killed out there."

"Not you," said Dick. "Not with that dog of yours."

"A lot of use he was! Not much of a bodyguard, are you, Bruce?"

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Dick bent down and patted the dog. He shook off the man's detaining hand and said as he turned away, "You'll never know how much use he really was."

He got into the car without looking back. In the mirror, as he moved off, he saw the woman slink away into the house, while her father stood dizzily on the driveway, making absurd gestures of gratitude at his rescuer.

Monty was waiting for him in the hall, ever-faithful. The Chief lay stretched out on the settee, half asleep. Dick put on their leashes and the checked coat on Monty and opened the front door.

"Time for a beer before the pub closes, Monty," he said, "and then we'll go on the common." He and the dogs sniffed the diesel-laden air and Monty sneezed. "Bless you," said Dick. "Lousy hole this, isn't it? It's a damn shame, but you're going to have to wait a bit longer for our place in Scotland."

Slowly, because Monty couldn't make it fast any more, the three of them walked toward the George Tavern.

"Q"

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a NEW Dr. Sam Hawthorne story by

EDWARD D. HOCH

In which Dr. Sam Hawthorne, the retired New England country doctor, reminisces about another "miracle problem"—how Julian Chabert, a contemporary competitor of Houdini, was tied, chained, and locked in an old lobster shack whose four sides were under constant surveillance by more than a hundred people, and how the magician escaped—in his own fashion. . .a fascinating baffler in the 'tec tradition of (seemingly an incongruous combination) Edgar Wallace and John Dickson Carr. . .

THE PROBLEM OF THE LOBSTER SHACK

by EDWARD D. HOCH

"Now I want to tell you 'bout the lobster shack, which was just 'bout the most bafflin' of all the mysteries that confronted me during those early years. It would have been in the summer of '24 (Dr. Sam Hawthorne was saying), when Harry Houdini was still alive and popular. I was only a strugglin' young New England doctor at the time and still somewhat in awe of people like magicians and brain surgeons.

"Pour yourself another—ah—small libation and settle back while I tell you. . ."

The magician's name was Julian Chabert, but perhaps I'd better begin with the brain surgeon since he was my introduction to Chabert. Even in a little town like Northmont I'd heard plenty of stories about the fabulous Dr. Felix Dory. Back in 1924 there weren't that many brain surgeons 'round, and his fame had spread from Boston like the ever-widening ripples in a pond.

I'd been practicin' medicine some two years in Northmont when the serious illness of a nearby farmer first brought me

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into personal contact with Dr. Dory. When I determined that a brain operation was the only chance of savin' my patient's life, I telephoned the great man at his Boston hospital. He was willin' to see my patient, so I drove into the city myself, using the Pierce-Arrow Runabout as a makeshift ambulance. Dr. Dory operated that night and saved the farmer's life.

When I met him for the first time that day, I was startled by the quiet diffidence of the man. I'd expected someone brash and confident, with white hair flyin' in all directions, issuing orders to his nurses as he moved through the hospital corridors like some sort o' whirlwind. What I found instead was a pleasant man in his mid-forties who spoke softly and took credit for virtually nothin'.

I was young enough to be his son, but he took the time to explain the surgical procedure in great detail. When I praised his skill and suggested that he was a forerunner in the newest techniques of brain surgery, he merely scoffed. "Nonsense, Dr. Hawthorne! Is that what they call you back home? Dr. Hawthorne?"

"Mostly it's Dr. Sam," I admitted.

"Well, Dr. Sam, the art of making openings in the skull was known to the ancients, though I'll admit that surgery of human brains has progressed more slowly than other forms of surgery. We know that prehistoric man performed trephination, but we don't know why. And there's evidence of brain surgery in pre-Christian Peru."

Despite what he said, brain surgery was still a rare procedure in 1924. The few doctors who practiced it usually developed their own ingenious surgical tools, and Felix Dory was no exception. That first time we met he showed me a probe with a tiny light on it and a barbed steel wire that could be used as a bone saw. Today variations of both these tools are used in surgery, but back in '24 I could only stare at them and gape. To me the man was a magician.

I saw Dr. Dory two or three more times during the spring of that year, whenever some aspect of my profession brought me to Boston. Unlike the other country doctors I'd come to know, I was not content to sit out the years of my life in Northmont, unfamiliar with the progress being made in the world around me. The great teaching hospitals of Boston were a source of knowledge, and it was knowledge that could help my patients back home. So I came to get it.

It was in the late spring that

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Felix Dory first mentioned his daughter's impending marriage plans. "Linda is a fine lovely girl," he said with more than a touch of fatherly pride. "She's just turned twenty, and I suppose I still think of her as a child. But she's a young woman and they're very much in love."

"They met at college?"

Dr. Dory nodded. "Tom Forsyth is graduating in June, then going on to law school. Naturally I wanted them to wait, but you know how young people are these days."

I certainly did, since I still considered myself one. "Is she your only child?"

He nodded sadly. "The house will be empty without her. Even away at college she often comes home weekends. But I suppose Edith and I will get used to it." He had a sudden thought. "The groom's family has a summer place up the coast, near Newburyport. The third weekend in June they're having an engagement party for Tom and Linda. Would you and your wife like to come?"

The invitation from this man I hardly knew so astounded me that I had no answer. All I could think to say was, "I'm not married."

"Well, your girl, then."

"I'm afraid it would have to be my nurse. But are you sure it'll be all right?"

"Certainly! I like you, Dr. Sam. And I want to convince my daughter that my colleagues aren't all bearded old fogies. Give me your address and I'll see that you receive an invitation."

My colleagues.

The phrase repeated itself in my mind all the way back to Northmont that day. I was a colleague of the most famous brain surgeon on the east coast. He'd said so himself.

"How'd you like to go to an engagement party?" I asked April as I entered the office. She was a plump jolly woman in her thirties, and she'd been my nurse since the day I arrived in Northmont.

"Who's gettin' engaged?" she asked.

"The daughter of Dr. Felix Dory."

"Land sakes! And you're invited?"

"I will be. And I'm going to take you, April." I could see the idea pleased her. "Will you go?"

"Mebbe. I gotta get used to the idea."

But pleased as she was I don't think she really believed it till the engraved invitation arrived two weeks later. The party was to be an all-day affair, on a Saturday at the Forsyth home. There would be tennis and swimmin', with a

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special performance by the world-famous escape artist, Julian Chabert.

I had to admit they knew how to do it in style.

When the big day finally arrived on the third weekend in June, happily without any last-minute complications from injured farmers or their pregnant wives, April and I started out in the morning for the two-hour trip to Newburyport in my Runabout. I'd never seen her quite so dressed up, with her hair close-cropped up the back and wearing a deep cloche hat that matched her pale pink summer dress.

"Do I look all right?" she asked, as we drove across the North Bridge and left the town behind us.

"Beautiful! You should dress like that in the office."

"Oh, it wouldn't be right for a nurse!" she answered, taking me seriously. Then, after we'd driven a ways in silence, she asked, "Who is this Julian Chabert?"

"I suppose you'd call him a poor man's Houdini. He performs the same sort of escape tricks. From what I hear he's just as skillful, but he lacks Houdini's showmanship." During the past few years Houdini's name had been often in the public press. When he wasn't escaping from a packin' box under water, he was makin' an elephant disappear from the stage of New York's Hippodrome, or exposin' the trickery of a fake medium.

"Will he do some tricks today?"

"I expect so. I wonder how the Forsyths got hold of him."

The road to Newburyport was narrow and rutted, with only the trail markings to guide us. We were still two years away from the present numbering system for highways, and lengthy journeys by car were somethin' of an adventure.

When we finally reached the Forsyth home, it proved to be a sprawlin' white house set smack-dab in the middle of an estate that ran from the highway all the way to the edge of the ocean. I could see that the sight of it took April's breath away, and it very nearly did the same for me.

Happily, Dr. Dory and his wife were already in attendance. He welcomed me with a gracious handshake and I introduced April. "So glad you could both make it! This is my wife, Edith."

She was a pleasant woman with large diamond rings on her fingers. "I'm pleased to meet one of my husband's younger colleagues. Our daughter Linda says all doctors are old fogies."

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"That's what your husband told me," I said. "Where is the happy couple?"

"In the back with our hosts." Dory led the way around the side of the big house, and we saw that a huge tent had been erected for the party. There must have been a hundred people present already, and many of them were sippin' champagne cocktails though it was barely noon. "We won't be raided," Dory assured me, as if readin' my mind. "The police chief is one of the guests."

Linda Dory and Tom Forsyth were close to each other, at the center of the crowd of well-wishers. I had to admit they were a handsome couple — she with a natural beauty that reflected and enhanced her mother's friendly good looks, and he with a wealth of charm that could work equally well on college girls and juries.

Forsyth's parents, the party's hosts, were a bit of a surprise. I'd been expectin' the poise and charm of Dr. and Mrs. Dory, and they weren't in evidence. In fact, Pete Forsyth looked downright uncomfortable in his open polo shirt and ice-cream white slacks. I wondered how he made his living and decided not to speculate. It was none of my business.

"Are you at the Boston hospital, too?" Mrs. Forsyth asked. She wore too much makeup and was tryin' too hard to be the mother of the groom. But again, it wasn't my business.

"No, I have a small country practice in Northmont. This is my nurse, April."

"I sure do admire your house," April said. "Nothin' like this back in Northmont!"

"Thank you," Mrs. Forsyth said, glancing around nervously for her husband. An orchestra had started playin' dance music at the other end of the tent.

Suddenly there was a stirring, a murmur of anticipation. I saw Dr. Dory tug nervously at a bandaged finger as he strained for a view. "Chabert is here!" Linda Dory announced.

The crowd before me parted, and there he was, sweepin' into our midst with black cape flowing in the best tradition of the stage magician. He *was* a showman, it seemed, and maybe he'd equal Houdini's success someday. Pete Forsyth held out his hand, but the escape artist didn't take it. Instead, he motioned to a short bald man at his side. "This is my business manager, Mark Ernst. Some of you met him last evening. Are we ready for the performance?"

Forsyth nodded. "We'll use the lobster shack down by the shore, as we discussed last night."

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"Fine. You may choose a committee of guests to search the shack, to search me, and to tie and chain me in any way they please. I'll be left alone and the shack locked from the outside. You may guard it, all of you. I will walk out of the shack, free of my bonds, in five minutes, no more."

While he spoke, my eyes had settled on the future bridegroom's face. Tom Forsyth seemed unusually nervous, and I was tryin' to determine why.

"Dr. Sam."

The sound of my name interrupted my thinkin'. Felix Dory was speakin'. "Pete suggests you and me for the committee. How about it?"

"And our police chief," Forsyth added. "He should be an expert on locking people up."

"I'll get him," Mrs. Forsyth said. She was gone only a few moments and returned with an overweight, red-faced man. "Chief Banner, this is Dr. Felix Dory. And Mrs. Dory. You know, Linda's parents."

"Happy t' meet you," the Chief said, shakin' Dory's hand, then hoistin' his pants a little.

"And Dr. Sam Hawthorne, all the way from Northmont."

I took his hand and introduced April. "I don't want ye to think all this open drinkin' goes on here all the time," he confided to us. "But the Forsyths are somethin' special hereabouts. And a weddin' is a weddin' — right?"

"Right," I agreed. "Just when is the weddin'?"

"First Sat'aday in August. Big affair." He reached into his pocket. "Want a cigar?"

"No, thanks."

"We should go down to inspect the lobster shack," Dr. Dory suggested.

I followed along behind Dory and the Chief, and some of the other guests trailed us. The wide lawn sloped gradually down from the tent to the shoreline, perhaps a hundred yards away. It was a rocky shore, with only a narrow beach. At one point, where the land jutted into the sea, stood a small wooden structure. Even at a distance I could make out the details of its construction — one door and two windows at the side, a short pier connected with the door and running to the water, and a chimney which told me there was a fireplace inside.

The three boats tied up at the dock were hardly the craft of lobster fishermen, and it was obvious the place was no longer used for its original purpose. Even the old wooden lobster traps piled near the doorway were present only for scenic effect, as was a fishin' rod

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propped against one of the two windows.

"Pete gave me the key," Dr. Dory said as he unlocked the door. "He uses it as a boathouse — keeps his fishin' gear here."

The inside was not as cluttered as I'd expected. There were a number of fishin' rods and reels, one of the reels unwound on the floor, but otherwise the place was neat and reasonably clean.

"They do surf castin'," Chief Banner observed. "Expensive gear, too."

Felix Dory strode over to a wooden post in the center of the room. It was a support for the roof and ran from floor to ceiling. "This seems sturdy enough," he decided, after giving it a hard tug. "Suppose after they get the chains on him we bring him in here and tie him to this post? Then we'll lock the door from the outside. If he can get out of this shack in five minutes I'm willing to grant he's a magician."

"We better search the place first," Chief Banner said. "Make sure he hasn't got a friend hidin' here already."

A careful search revealed nothing. There was really noplace anyone could hide in the lobster shack, except for a tall wooden cupboard against one wall. This proved to be empty, and the wall behind it was solid.

"What about the chimney?" Chief Banner suggested as we were about to leave. We checked it together and found the tiny opening plugged at the top by a bird's nest.

"They haven't used this fireplace in a long time," I said.

We went back outside to the crowd of spectators, who'd formed themselves into a semicircle around the lobster shack. At first I didn't see Julian Chabert, but then he broke through the crowd, stridin' down the grassy slope in bright green bathin' trunks. I heard a few gasps from the women guests when they saw his bare chest. Even Olympic swimmer Johnny Weissmuller still wore a top to his bathing suit.

But I wasn't surprised. I'd seen newspaper photos of Houdini, chained and wearin' only bathin' trunks, ready for one of his impossible escapes. In fact, they said he'd once escaped from a jail cell in New York's Tombs while completely naked.

While Chabert's business manager stood to one side with a faint smile on his lips, Pete Forsyth came forward. "All right, now we need a committee to chain him."

"How about the future bride and groom?" someone shouted. "They'll get to know what married life is like!"

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Linda and Tom came forward amidst good-natured kidding and took up the lengths of chain. They wrapped them tightly around Chabert's arms and legs, until he could barely hobble into the lobster shack. Padlocks were produced and examined, then snapped into place. It seemed impossible that the man could free himself without aid.

We guided him into the shack while the guests crowded around the open door to watch. Chief Banner had produced a stout length of rope which he wrapped around Chabert's shoulders, towering above the magician as he worked. He made a firm knot, tying the already chained man to the stout wooden post. I took another length of rope and secured him at the knees. His hands, already tightly chained in front of him, were further restrained by a final chain that locked him to the wooden post.

"There you are!" Pete Forsyth announced with somethin' like pride. "Tied and helpless, roped and chained, nearly nude so you can see he conceals no tools or keys."

"One last precaution," Dr. Dory suggested. "I'll take this hammer and nail the windows shut." He went around to the outside while Pete Forsyth prepared to lock and bolt the door.

"Any final words?" Forsyth asked.

Julian Chabert merely smiled at us, lookin' not the least bit uncomfortable. "I will be with you in five minutes. You may start timing me from right now."

Forsyth slammed the door, threw the bolt, and padlocked it. Around the side we heard Dr. Dory finish with his hammerin'. "I don't suppose that was really necessary," he said, comin' around to rejoin us. "There are people on all sides of the shack, so no one could get in there to free him without being seen."

"That's for sure," young Tom Forsyth agreed. I noticed he was holdin' Linda's hand tightly.

I'd almost forgotten April, but she reminded me with a tug at my sleeve. "Stay with me now, Dr. Sam! I don't know any o' these people!"

"Neither do I, April." Glancin' around at their eager, slightly drunk faces, I decided I'd never know them. I was a country doctor, and these were the people in an F. Scott Fitzgerald short story — people right out o' the pages of *The Smart Set* or *Vanity Fair*.

"Two minutes gone!" Pete Forsyth proclaimed.

April and I walked over to where Mark Ernst, Chabert's

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manager, was standin'. "This must be old stuff for you," I said.

The little bald man shrugged. "Every escape is a little bit different. He likes unusual settings, and it's tough finding ones that Harry Houdini hasn't already used."

"How does he do it?"

Mark Ernst merely smiled. "Magic, Doctor. Pure magic."

"Just one more minute!" Forsyth proclaimed. We could feel the tension in the guests as they waited for the locked door of the lobster shack to open.

"Thirty seconds!"

All conversation had stopped. I saw Felix Dory give his daughter's arm a little squeeze, saw Mrs. Forsyth refill her glass of champagne.

"Ten seconds!"

I watched a gull circle slowly overhead, perhaps wonderin' what all these foolish people were doing standin' outside a lobster shack on a hot June afternoon.

"The five minutes are up," Forsyth said, his voice flat, even harsh.

Everyone watched the door of the lobster shack.

Nothing happened.

We waited a full minute.

Nothin' happened.

"I guess we did too good a job tyin' him up," Chief Banner remarked.

Mark Ernst edged forward to reassure Forsyth. "I've seen him do this trick a hundred times. Don't worry, he'll get out. It's just taking him longer than usual."

By the end of the second minute past the deadline, the guests were growin' obviously restless. Pete Forsyth walked to the door and called out, "Are you all right in there, Chabert?"

There was no answer.

Cursing softly, Mark Ernst stepped forward. "I told you not to worry!" he pleaded.

So we waited some more.

After five minutes had passed, Tom and Linda tried to peer in the side windows, but they were painted over in black on the inside. Nothin' could be seen.

After seven minutes Forsyth said, "I'm unlockin' the door."

I stepped forward and was at his side when the door swung open. The first thing I saw was the bloodstained huntin' knife on the floor near the window. I pushed past Forsyth and entered the shack first. "Keep everyone else back!" I warned.

Julian Chabert was still tied and chained to the wooden post. But now his head sagged at the unmistakable angle of death.

Someone had entered the locked lobster shack, unseen by a hundred witnesses completely

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surrounding the shack, and cut Chabert's throat.

Chief Banner took charge immediately, and in these first moments of panic and confusion he seemed secretly pleased with himself. Maybe he was enjoyin' his temporary mastery of these wealthy people with their fancy home overlookin' the ocean.

"All right, now!" he bellowed. "Everybody quiet down! We got a murder here, an' I'm gettin' to the bottom o' it! Now I helped search that shack myself — me an' the two docs here — an' we know there wasn't a livin' creature hidin' there. We jus' searched it agin with the same result. Nobody's in there but the dead man. That means somebody killed him while we was all standin' around out here. Now who saw anythin'?"

Mrs. Forsyth was the first to reply. "Nobody entered that shack, Chief Banner. Nobody even went near it!"

"He must have killed himself," young Tom Forsyth said.

"With his hands tied and chained?" Chief Banner asked. "An' where'd he have the knife hidden — in his throat?"

Felix Dory stepped forward, the cool professional brain surgeon always in control. "There's no doubt he was murdered. If we find out why, maybe we'll find out who."

"None of us even knew him!" Pete Forsyth argued. He was taking the killing as a personal affront to his party. "He was just a hired performer." He turned on Chabert's manager. "And speaking of that, I'll expect a refund of my five hundred dollars!"

Through it all Mark Ernst's behavior had been the strangest. The bald little manager seemed alternately terrified and delighted, movin' with a sideways step that was almost a skip, yet at the same time wipin' away the tears from his eyes with a tremblin' hand. "What'll I do without him?" he moaned. "He's been my whole life!"

I glanced around at the millin', confused guests and saw that some order must be made out of this chaos. Already some of them were headin' across the great lawn towards their cars, anxious to avoid any involvement. Seein' what was happenin', Chief Banner ran up ahead of them and drew a revolver from under his coat.

"Now listen here, you folks! I'm plantin' myself smack-dab in the center o' this lawn, an' if anyone tries t' run by me an' git away, they's gonna git a bullet in the leg! Understan'?"

They understood. The exodus came to a sudden halt.

But Pete Forsyth came run-

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nin' up, wavin' his arms. "Look here, Chief, you can't talk that way to my guests! My God, you're treating them like common criminals!"

I stepped quickly between the two men. "Let's go into the house," I suggested. "Mr. Forsyth, if you'll be good enough to furnish us with a guest list, Chief Banner can check off the names on it and then allow most of these people to leave. It's obvious they had nothin' to do with the crime."

My suggestion seemed agreeable to everyone, and we trooped into the big white house. Banner was crankin' up the telephone to summon his men, so I took advantage of the delay to pull Pete Forsyth aside for some questionin' of my own.

"How did you happen to hire Chabert for the entertainment?" I asked.

Forsyth nervously lit a cigar. "My God, how could this happen to me? The worst possible publicity!"

"How did you happen to hire him?" I repeated.

"He came to me. He showed up at my office one day last month with his manager. He'd heard my son was gettin' engaged and suggested I book his act. Well, I thought it would be a nice diversion."

"Did you or your wife know Chabert or Ernst before?"

He hesitated only a second. "No."

"But—?" I prompted.

"But Tom might have. I don't know."

Chief Banner stormed into the room, interruptin' us. "I'll do the questionin' here, Doc."

"Are your men on the way?"

He nodded. "We'll get to the bottom o' this. Don't you worry none, Mr. Forsyth."

I drifted out to the big living room, where I spotted Mark Ernst across the room and headed for him.

When he saw me he gestured towards the high ornate ceiling. "This is quite a joint, eh, Doc?"

"Could I talk to you privately? Before Chief Banner does?"

"Sure, Doc. What's on your mind? Got a little act you'd like me to manage?"

I led him past a knot of anxious, babbling guests, thinkin' that they were all gettin' drunker by the minute. Forsyth had made no effort to lock up the champagne, despite the imminent arrival of more police.

Once I had Ernst safely in the study, I closed the door and said, "You don't seem too broken up by the death of your star client."

"Sure I'm broken up! He was a good guy!"

"Was Julian Chabert his real name?"

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"No. That was the name of some French magician from a hundred years ago. He found it in a book."

"What was his real name?"

"Sammy Gorman. He was from New York. Learned his stuff watching Houdini."

"How was he supposed to escape from that shack?"

"Those were his secrets. He didn't even tell me!"

"But you must have some idea."

The little man shifted nervously. "I can't tell you. Maybe I'll find another magician to take Chabert's place."

I tried a different approach. "Chabert must have been insured. Some of his underwater stunts were dangerous."

"Sure he was insured."

"Any wife or kids?"

"Him? You kidding? He didn't like girls."

"Then who was the beneficiary on his policy?"

"Well . . . I guess I was."

"A strong motive for murder, isn't it?"

"Hell, I didn't kill him."

"Someone did." I tried again. "How was the trick supposed to be done?"

"They won't pin this on me, will they?"

"Maybe."

"I was outside. Everyone saw me. I never even went in there!"

"But maybe there was somethin' in the way he did the trick, some way you could kill him by remote control."

"All right," he said. "I'll tell you what I know. He had a key to the locks hidden in his mouth, under his tongue. As long as his hands were chained in front of him, which he insisted on, he could spit the key out and catch it."

"What about the ropes?"

"He flexed his muscles while you were tying him up."

"And the locked door?"

"He had a couple of ways of working that. Do you have to know all his secrets?"

"I guess you've told me enough," I agreed. "Except who might have killed him — if *you* didn't."

"Honest, I don't know a thing about that!"

"Whose idea was it to come here?"

"His. He read about the engagement in the papers."

"Did he always approach rich people for jobs?"

"No, never before. But he thought Forsyth might be good for a bundle. Said he was a bootlegger, running the stuff in from boats offshore."

The revelation didn't surprise me. In fact, it explained a great many things. "All right," I said. "Stick around and tell your story to the Chief." I headed for

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the French doors overlooking the back lawn.

"Where you going?" Mark Ernst asked.

"Back to the lobster shack."

Chief Banner's men were there now, carefully untying the body, examining the doors and windows and every inch of the shack. "Nothin' on the floor, nothin' outa place," Banner compained. "It's just like it was when we searched it earlier, Doc."

"Did you check the chimney again?"

"Sure did. And the windows that Dr. Dory nailed shut. There's nothin' to go on. The thing's impossible."

Felix Dory had joined us in the doorway. "I could have opened the window and thrown a knife at him."

Chief Banner snorted. "Sure you coulda! Except that you were hammerin' away while we was still inside talkin' to him. And a hundred witnesses swear the windows weren't opened, then or later. And the knife couldna been thrown an' leave a wound like that. It had to be drawn across his throat by a human hand."

"Then it must be suicide," Dory insisted. "Anything else is impossible!" He picked up the fishin' rod that was leanin' against the outside of the shack and kicked at one of the old lobster traps.

While they argued about it I stood lookin' at the pile of old traps. Their wooden slats were broken and rotted. They hadn't been used in a long time. I thought about Chabert, lured into the shack like a lobster into its trap. The only difference was that the lobster stayed alive, Chabert hadn't.

I saw Edith Dory walkin' along the shore with a comforting arm about her daughter, and I went to meet them. "Don't worry," I said reassuringly. "I'm certain the police will straighten it out."

But Linda Dory was close to tears. "They think Tom did it!" she wailed.

"What's that? How could they?"

"Apparently Tom knew him," Mrs. Dory explained. "We don't know the details, but Chief Banner's men are questioning him now."

I left them and trotted back up to the house, anxious to see what was goin' on. Apparently Tom Forsyth had just been interrogated. He stood in the front hall, pale and shaken, talkin' softly to his father. When they saw me they both fell silent.

I motioned to some departin' guests. "Are the police checkin' them off all right?"

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Pete Forsyth nodded. "Thanks to your suggestion."

"What's this about your son?"

Tom glanced away, embarrassed, and his father replied, "The damn fool is too honest for his own good. He had to go and tell 'em he knew Chabert."

"Where did you know him from, Tom?"

"New York. I spent last summer there."

I was beginnin' to see the light, and it wasn't a very pleasant light. "Chabert told his manager he thought you'd be good for a bundle of money, Mr. Forsyth. He knew you were a bootlegger. I think he came here with blackmail on his mind. Under the guise of payin' him for his performance, you'd really have been payin' for his silence."

Pete Forsyth grimaced. "You've seen Chief Banner. Do you think he cares if I'm a bootlegger?"

"Maybe Chabert wasn't blackmailin' you because of whiskey. Maybe he was blackmailin' you because of your son."

Forsyth glanced at Tom, then looked at me. "How much do you know?"

"Tom must have been a pretty close friend to tell Chabert his father was a bootlegger. And it was the announcement of Tom's engagement that brought Chabert here. His manager implied that Chabert was a homosexual—"

"All right," Tom Forsyth interrupted, his face contorted with agony. "It was a foolish, crazy thing that happened last summer and lasted exactly one night. I was sick with myself for months afterwards. I'd hoped with Linda I could get over even the memory of it!"

"And Chabert wanted money?"

Pete Forsyth nodded. "Fifty grand to keep his mouth shut."

"What did you tell him?"

"That I knew guys who'd put him at the bottom of the ocean in a concrete coffin."

"And that scared him off?"

"It seemed to. He didn't mention it again—just talked about today's performance."

"When did all this happen?"

"Last evening."

"Was anyone else present?"

"Not during this. Felix and Edith Dory joined us when we were talking about using the lobster shack for Chabert's escape."

"So only you and your son knew of the blackmail attempt." I turned to Tom. "Did you tell all this to the police?"

"Most of it. I didn't say my father threatened him."

"All right." I moved away as some of the departing guests headed in our direction.

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One of them was April. "I'm all checked off the list. We goin' purty soon, Dr. Sam?"

"Yes, April, soon."

Chief Banner appeared in the doorway. "Okay, you, Doc. Down t' the lobster shack. You, too, Pete. By gum, I'm goin' to show ye how this trick was worked!"

"You mean you know who killed him?"

"I mean I know how he killed hisself."

We walked down and stood round the shack while Chief Banner leaned against the post inside, his arms crossed in front of him, in the manner of the dead man. "Look here, now. We know Chabert was—well, queer. Call it what ye want, he was sick. So he decided to kill hisself, but in a magical way. I guess he figured he'd go out with big headlines."

"He wouldn't kill himself," Mark Ernst insisted from the sidelines.

"Oh, no? Well, I'm gonna show you how he done it! You told me, Ernst, that he had a duplicate key hidden in his mouth. Well, he used that key to unlock his chains, then he reached up here for the knife he'd hidden earlier." His hands went above his head, barely reaching one of the ceiling beams. "He put the key back in his mouth, where we found it, cut his throat, tossed the knife away, and while he was bleedin' to death he snapped shut the padlock on his hands agin!"

"It doesn't seem very likely," Pete Forsyth observed.

"Likely or not, it's the only way! There weren't nobody in here with him, and nobody entered or left. We was all watchin'. He killed hisself — it's the only way!"

The police began packin' up their equipment, and the Forsyths headed back to the house. I walked out onto the dock and stood for a time gazin' off into the choppy water. Presently Dr. Dory came and stood at my side.

"What do you think, Dr. Sam? Are you satisfied with the Chief's solution?"

"No," I answered simply. "It would take a superhuman effort to lock those chains again after cutting one's own throat. Besides, you saw how Chief Banner had to stretch to reach that beam, and Chabert was much shorter. He couldn't have done it."

"Why didn't you tell the Chief?"

I shrugged. "The truth wouldn't bring Chabert back. Besides, he was a blackmailer. Worse than a blackmailer, for what he did to Tom Forsyth."

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"Yes."

I bent and picked up a pebble from the dock and sent it spinnin' out into the water. "I know you killed him, Felix." It was the first time I'd ever used his given name.

"Yes," he said again.

"And I know how. When he found he couldn't blackmail Pete Forsyth, Chabert must have tried you. You knew how much the weddin' meant to your daughter, and you had faith in Tom. So you killed Chabert to silence his filthy mouth. What tipped me off to your method was the fishin' line, of course.

"When we searched the shack earlier the reel was unwound on the floor. But later, when the police searched the place, the floor was bare—the Chief said so. Forsyth had given you the key to the shack. It was a simple thing for you to come down in the night, or early this morning, and set the stage for your impossible crime."

"This morning," he said in confirmation. "Just at sunrise."

"You arranged the fishin' line very carefully, so when it was pulled tight it rose to just the level of Chabert's throat. It was you who suggested tyin' him to the post, and you who suggested nailin' the windows shut. While you were nailin' the far window—*after* we'd closed the door and locked it—you used your body to shield what you were really doin'—reelin' in that fishin' line. It pulled taut, some five feet or so off the floor, and caught naturally in the soft flesh of his neck.

"Chabert was still chained and helpless. You reeled in the line fast and cut his throat with it, in much the same manner that a few London residents were killed by the danglin' cables of barrage balloons during the World War. The window only had to be open a fraction of an inch to allow the fishin' line to pass through the openin'. You'd tied the huntin' knife loosely to the end of the line, and stained it with blood, probably chicken blood—"

"Human blood," Dr. Dory corrected, holding up his bandaged finger. "I took no chances."

"When the knife hit the window sill it came free of the line and fell to the floor. Chabert was dead, the shack was locked from the outside, and the illusion was complete. He couldn't have done it better himself."

Felix Dory smiled. "You're forgetting the human element. The fishing line might have done no more than give him a bad skin burn, and he might have screamed for help."

"The sound of your hammerin' — while you were reelin' in

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the line with your other hand — would have covered any yellin' unless it was lengthy. And you made sure it wasn't. This is guesswork, but I think a portion of the line was replaced with your own specialty — the barbed steel wire you use as a bone saw. You'd carry a length of it in your medical bag surely, ready for any emergency."

"You're a clever young man, Dr. Sam. You'll go far."

"I should have tumbled to it earlier. The fishin' rod was leanin' against the window outside the first time we searched the shack. And I saw you pickin' it up a while ago — disposin' of the evidence. Your steel wire came directly out the window, at the level of Chabert's throat, and onto the reel you wound with your left hand. A fake line runnin' to the top of the rod didn't move, so anyone watching your back while you hammered wouldn't realize the reel was even movin'."

"What are you going to do?" he asked finally.

I stared at the water for a long time. "It's not for me to do anything, Felix. It's for you."

"I see." He chewed his lower lip. "Give me till after the wedding. All right?"

"All right." He'd saved a good many lives in his day. Maybe he'd have a chance to save a few more.

"I drove back to Northmont with a slightly drunk April that evening (Dr. Sam concluded) and I never heard from Felix Dory again. The Chabert case was closed with a verdict of suicide. Three months later, some weeks after his daughter's marriage, Dory was killed when his car hit a tree on the Boston Post Road.

"But there were other things on my mind that summer. For one, it was the summer of the haunted bandstand. Now if you've got time for another —ah—small libation, I'll tell you about that one. You see, folks were gettin' ready for a big Fourth o' July celebration. . ."

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